PYRAMID®

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SETBACKS

MAD AS BONES
by Christopher R. Rice

MONSTERS' MINIONS
by Michele Armellini

SPACESHIP MALFUNCTIONS
by David L. Pulver

DESIGNER'S NOTES: THE SILK ROAD
by Matt Riggsby

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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Each article is color-coded to help you find your favorite sections.

Pale Blue: In This Issue
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Green: Columnist
Dark Blue: ***GURPS*** Features
Purple: Systemless Features

COVER ART

Christopher Shy

IN THIS ISSUE

Adventurers are only as cool as the obstacles they overcome. In an effort to give heroes the opportunity to be more heroic, we present this issue devoted to setbacks, snags, and complications.

Maintaining stability in the face of adversity is a challenge for even the most seasoned of investigators; can you keep from going *Mad as Bones?* Christopher R. Rice – co-author of ***GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic*** – presents a complete optional ***GURPS*** system that allows for tracking and influencing the stability of heroes in challenging situations. Now heroes can struggle – and hopefully prevail – against fear, isolation, mental fatigue, and other ephemeral afflictions with more variety than ever.

Long story short, the heroes have poked something they shouldn't have, and now they need to face the *Monsters' Minions.* Michele Armellini – author of ***GURPS Locations: St. George's Cathedral*** – presents 16 threats that would be well-suited for a ***GURPS Monster Hunters*** campaign, or any modern-day ***GURPS*** campaign where the heroes fight against the forces of evil. Now you can have stats at a moment's notice – and a little background – for a pugilist, collaborator, or an old family servant . . . and a dozen other denizens of darkness!

In space, only your crewmates can hear you say "uh-oh" as you hurriedly deal with *Spaceship Malfunctions.* ***GURPS Spaceships*** author David L. Pulver presents options for having things go wrong with the various ***Spaceships*** components of a vessel, and how to fix them. For those looking to save a few bucks at the shipyard, it also includes options for reducing the price of a ship if it has problems. From radiation leaks to jammed turrets to software bugs, now traveling the void between the stars just got a *lot* more interesting . . .

Historically speaking, getting from here to there has always involved setbacks and complications, as showcased in *Designer's Notes: The Silk Road.* Matt Riggsby – author of ***GURPS Hot Spots: The Silk Road*** – looks at some recent discoveries in this historical connection of East and West, plus describes a handful of supernatural beasts that would make a great threat for those undergoing the expedition.

This issue also includes a Random Thought Table that looks at how to add setbacks that the players will appreciate. Whether in the past, present, or future – or struggling with your own mental fortitude – this issue of *Pyramid* is sure to have something to give heroes new ways to prove their mettle!

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From the Editor

When Things Go Wrong for All the Right Reasons

When we first started the third volume of *Pyramid* magazine over eight years ago now, one of the possibilities I insisted we squeak in was "miscellaneous"-themed issues. After all, I reasoned, I'd hate for good articles to fall by the wayside just because I couldn't find a theme to tie them to.

To date, we haven't had one of those miscellaneous issues. To be fair, we've had some motlier issues than others, but I like to think that we've done a good job of tying together contents with a unifying theme.

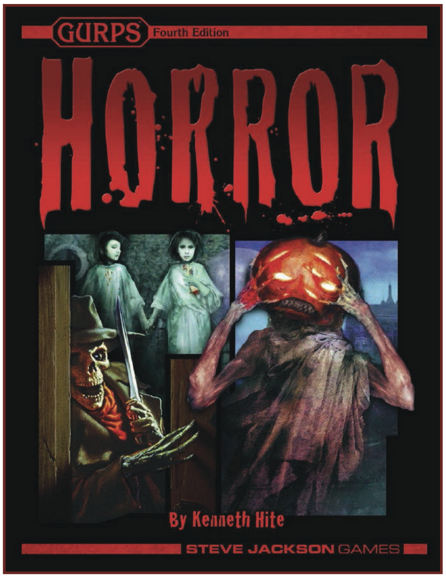
For a while, this issue looked like it might be the exception to the miscellaneous rule. But when I took another look at the articles I had that I wanted to find a home for – and when I asked David Pulver and Christopher R. Rice about their thoughts for articles for this issue – I realized that I *could* do an issue revolving around a broad theme of things going wrong.

This issue also focuses on some elements that I try to do for *Pyramid:* having at least one article that will ideally be of use to most groups, keeping you abreast of something new and cool among ***GURPS,*** and providing you with something that you didn't know you wanted until you saw it.

So hopefully you find an issue that includes spaceships, the Silk Road, madness, and minions as awesome as I do just thinking about it.

Write Here, Write Now

Regardless of how you felt about this issue, we want to hear about it! Let us know if this issue is as cool as we envisioned, or if it's a "setback" to the quality you usually associate with *Pyramid*. You can write privately at **pyramid@sjgames.com,** or *set* your thoughts down *back* at the public space of **forums.sjgames.com.**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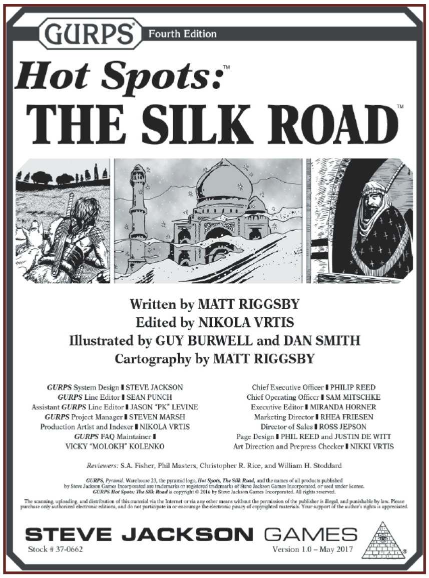
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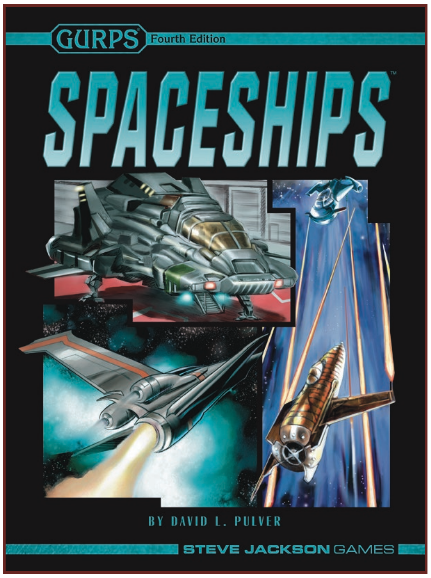
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SPACESHIPS
BY DAVID L. PULVER
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MAD AS BONES

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE

For everything there is a price. Even heroes experience setbacks from time to time. Sometimes, it's just fleeting; sometimes, it scars and disfigures . . . and not all wounds can be seen. ***GURPS Horror*** introduces *stress and derangement* as a way to keep track of how "mentally" fatigued someone is. However, while they function somewhat like fatigue points, keeping track of the differences can be difficult. If you add in *Fright Checks* rules (p. B360), things become even more complicated. Instead, why not just treat such mental fatigue as if it were Fatigue Points in the first place? In fact, why not use the marvelous mechanic of Long-Term Fatigue Points from ***GURPS After the End*** to help keep track of how far you slipped down the rabbit hole? This article presents a new, detailed system that allows you to do exactly that.

> *If we are all insane, then all insanity becomes a matter of degree.*
>
> *– Stephen King*

FOLLOW THE RULES OR GO MAD

This system introduces two new secondary attributes. The first measures how stressed, mentally exhausted, anxious, or troubled the character is and are called *Stability Points* (SP). The second is called *Long-Term Stability Points* (LSP), an indicator of how mentally disturbed a character currently is. LSP act as a "cap" for SP – the higher the LSP, the less SP the person can recover.

Stability Points (SP)

±2 points per ±1 SP

Stability Points represent your mental well-being and are a measure of how stressed you currently are. By default, you have SP equal to your IQ. For instance, IQ 10 gives 10 SP.

You can increase Stability Points at the cost of 2 points per level, or reduce them for -2 points per SP. You cannot raise SP past 20, or lower them by more than 4, without GM permission. In a realistic campaign, the GM should not allow SP to vary by more than ±30% of Will; e.g., a Will 10 character could have between 7 and 13 SP. In some campaigns, you cannot raise SP *at all* – ask the GM first!

You can temporarily lose SP to special attacks (e.g., the touch of a ghost), stress, Fright Checks, severe mental disturbances (e.g., if you have Truthfulness and managed to lie or if you suffer from Nightmares), grief (e.g., anything that might trigger Guilt Complex), severe emotional trauma (e.g., being forced to kill if you have Pacifism), and other similar situations. You can also "burn" SP to power supernatural abilities (p. 6).

If you lose enough SP, you will eventually become overstressed; if you lose too many SP, you will *go mad.* Lost SP do *not* reduce IQ, despite being based on IQ. The loss *does* cause penalties to Will rolls as well as some IQ and Perception rolls! Loss is often compared to a multiple of your SP; e.g., "2×SP" or "SP/2." Where this is the case, use your *base* SP score in the formula, not your *current* SP total.

Whenever a roll to resist SP loss is required, rolls of 14 or higher automatically fail. Treat any margin of failure as though it were at least 1. When stress and insanity threaten, no one is getting off easy.

Long-Term Stability Points (LSP)

2 points per -1 LSP

Long-Term Stability Points represent "damage" done to your psyche that a few minutes of rest and relaxation isn't going to fix. LSP *start* at 0 and then increase. The maximum size of your overall SP pool is reduced by your accumulated LSP. Your SP can never be higher than your maximum SP score minus your LSP, until you remove some of those Long-Term Stability Points!

You gain 1 LSP whenever you go below a multiple of SP/2. For example, if you had SP 10 and lost 5 of them, you'd also gain 1 LSP. When you gain LSP, you *also* lose SP equal to the total amount lost! If you have LSP equal to your SP or worse, you fall unconscious *or* suffer from one of the listed effects until you recover; see *0 SP to -1×SP,* p. 7.

Negative LSP can be purchased. They represent your mental grit, inner strength, and how "well adjusted" you are. The GM should limit these extra levels of LSP to no more than 30% of your (IQ + Will)/2, if they are even allowed to be purchased in the first place. Note that the cost of LSP and SP are essentially the same, but purchased LSP allows you to defend against things that normal SP cannot – such a Sanity-Blasting attack (see *Innate Attack,* pp. 8-9), which directly targets LSP.

WAYS TO BECOME UNSTABLE

You can lose SP in a number of ways, detailed below. Additionally, stress tends to feed back on itself. Long-term stressful situations where you are not losing SP to any one event, but also unable to relax enough to *regain* SP (extended patrols or marches in enemy territory, locked in a bunker surrounded by zombies, etc.) require a daily Will roll to avoid gaining LSP. The following modifiers apply to any SP loss that can be resisted. A roll of 14 or higher on such Will attempts *always* fails.

Modifiers: Half of any Fearlessness bonus (round up) or Fearfulness penalty (round down); Unfazeable gives a flat +8. +1 for Combat Reflexes or -1 for Combat Paralysis. Other modifiers are conditional: -1 to -4 for Cowardice when your physical safety is at risk; +1 for Daredevil when charging into a scary situation; +1 for Higher Purpose when confronting threats you are sworn to oppose; +1 to +4 for Xenophilia when confronting monsters.

Culture Shock

Those without an appropriate Cultural Familiarity or Language (or of a different tech level) who are forced to deal with a society different from their own might suffer LSP gain. In such a situation, assess a gain of one LSP per week; actively trying to understand the society you are in by assimilating its culture or language allows a Will roll to resist. This roll is penalized depending on how different your native culture is from the one you are trying to understand:

- Culture or language is similar, but some words or gestures are different (e.g., an American in England): No penalty.
- Culture or language is different enough to be jarring (e.g., an American in France): -2 to Will roll.
- Culture or language is vastly different from your native one (e.g., an American in Japan): -4 to Will roll.
- Culture or language is completely alien (e.g., an American on an alien planet): -6 *or more* to Will roll.
- Per TL above or below your own native TL (e.g., a caveman operating in the 16th century): -2 per TL of difference (halve this for TLs below your own).

These penalties disappear once you have spent points on acquiring an appropriate Cultural Familiarity, Language, or TL. If you try to make an effort at fitting in or understanding, make two rolls every week – one roll to avoid gaining an LSP and another roll to shed one. Those with Cultural Adaptability are immune to this rule for cultures, while those with Language Talent add 2 to their rolls. Those with Broadminded add 1 to rolls to resist LSP gain. The GM may rule that those with an appropriate disadvantage related to their own native culture or beliefs – e.g., Fanaticism (the British Empire) – lose SP instead of gaining LSP.

Drug Use and Withdrawal

Withdrawal from psychologically addicting drugs can be a mind-wrenching experience. Treat withdrawing from psychological addiction the same as physiological addiction, except that the rolls are versus Will and failures cause SP loss instead of HP loss. The halving of Will below one-third SP *does* affect withdrawal rolls; see *Effects of Lost Stability,* p. 7.

Fear

Seeing a terrifying monster or coming upon a dead body can induce fright. This is similar to a mental disturbance (p. 6), but from a specific and immediate source. Whenever the GM deems it appropriate, make a Will roll with the following modifiers to resist SP loss; use the rules for mental disturbances (p. 6). Additionally, Fearlessness and Combat Reflexes add their full bonus to this roll to resist SP loss.

Bodies: +6 for a peaceful-looking body, prepared for burial; +2 for a dead body with no signs of violence; no modifier for most victims of violence; from -1 to -3 for grisly mutilations. Apply another -6 if the victim was your Dependent, -4 for a loved one, -2 for a friend, and -1 for an acquaintance. In all cases add a further +4 if the body is not human or a beloved non-human (e.g., your cat you've had for many years).

Physical Circumstances: -1 if the body, monster, etc. touches you; +1 if you witness it at a great distance (at least 100 yards); or +3 if you view it remotely (using Clairsentience, closed-circuit TV, etc.). Apply -1 if the area is physically isolated, -1 at night or in the dark (or in daylight, if you're a night-dweller!), and -2 if you are (or think you are) alone.

Heat of Battle: +5 if you are in combat when the terrifying thing happens or you first notice it.

Size: +1 for small monsters (dog-sized or smaller); no modifier for human-sized ones; -1 for anything bear-sized through elephantine; -3 for truly huge monsters (like Godzilla or King Kong); or -6 for mind-boggling sizes ("Look! The giant space virus is blocking out the sun!").These modifiers rate perceptions, and are subjective – don't use the monster's Size Modifier.

Unusual Appearance: -1 for disgusting features (e.g., a trail of slime or a foul odor); -2 for alien appearance (e.g., a five-sided head with one eye and two mouths on each side); or -3 or *more* for something that utterly defies the laws of biology and physics.

Hordes of Monsters: Roll at -1 for 5 monsters, -2 for 10, -3 for 20, -4 for 50, and -5 for 100 or more.

I HAVE NO CONTROL

Self-control rolls (p. B120) could be completely dumped and instead replaced with Will rolls. If so, the value of the disadvantage depends on the severity of the Will roll: 2.5× normal cost for Will-15, 2× cost for Will-10, 1.5× cost for Will-5, normal cost for Will, and half cost for Will+5.

While this may appeal to those with high Will, remember that Will rolls to resist SP loss always fail on a 14 or higher! Thus, Bad Temper with a Will-5 roll to resist would be worth -15 points, but also would result in a Will-5 roll to resist SP related to it.

Also note that some disadvantages like Nightmares would *not* benefit from this rule. It actually makes sense for Nightmares to have a Frequency of Appearance roll like Chronic Pain *instead* of a self-control roll – night terrors come on whether you want them to!

Preparation: +1 if you have previous personal experience with this kind of threat; +1 per exposure to this *particular* threat in 24 hours; +1 to +3 (depending on the quality of the report) if you learned the details of this particular situation before you witnessed it.

Fueling Supernatural Powers and Defending Against Attacks

Abilities may require SP in place of FP or LSP in place of HP. Some attacks can inflict SP loss; see *Innate Attack,* pp. 8-9, and *Terror,* p. 9, for examples.

Casting the Yellow King's Gaze Costs How Much?!

A simple switch to any magical system relying on FP might be to substitute casting costs for SP. This allows you to use familiar systems while completely changing the flavor of the magic. For powers-based systems you can do the same;- simply use the rules for Costs Fatigue (p. B111). Additionally, in powers-based systems, any roll to improvise powers, use extra effort, etc. require SP loss, not FP loss.

Mental Disturbance

Whenever you suffer a severe mental disturbance (e.g., you fail a self-control roll for a mental disadvantage), you immediately lose 1 SP per *three* points of your margin of failure (critical failure turns this into *LSP* gain); round for the worse. Since players are encouraged to waive self-control rolls when appropriate, resisting mental disadvantages during such a situation reduces SP.

If the event does not normally call for a roll, make a Will roll, including the modifiers from *Ways to Become Unstable* (see p. 5); as always, a 14 or higher fails. Suffer one-third your margin of failure as SP loss (minimum 1, even on a success); critical failure turns this into LSP instead. Extremely stressful events (e.g., such as the loss of a loved one) *double* (or *triple*) that loss.

You may always choose to give in to a disadvantage when it comes up; if you do this, you suffer the normal effects of the disadvantage and do not roll self-control. This allows you to *regain* SP instead of losing it. Giving into your habits and inner nature help you regain control of yourself! Make a Will roll instead and *add* one-third of your margin of success to your SP total (minimum of +1 SP); critical success also lets you recover an equal amount of LSP, while critical failure means you suffer the effects of the disadvantage and lose SP normally.

Shell-Shock

Any battle that involves real danger, regardless of length (though not simple sparring), causes stress. At the end of the battle, you lose at least 1 SP, modified as follows:

- You were injured: *+1 SP.*
- You received a major wound or were reduced to 0 HP: *+1 SP.*
- Intense or lasting fighting: *+1 SP.*
- Battle included horrific deaths or mutilations: *+1 SP (doubled if the event involved someone you know).*
- You made no attack or defense rolls during the fight: *-1 SP (minimum 0).*

At the GM's option, SP lost from combat stress can only be regained by no longer being in a combat zone, or is treated as negative SP for the purposes of how it is shed. Actually going into negative SP from combat stress is liable to cause any number of issues, including *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (***Horror,*** p. 144).

Social Isolation

Extended solitary confinement is stressful. The average person in such a situation must roll once per day to avoid losing 1 SP; those with Chummy roll once every 12 hours, and those with Gregarious roll every six hours. Those with Loner do not need to roll. This roll is at a bonus (up to +4) with suitable distractions available, or a penalty (up to -10) if the environment is particularly boring. Optionally, Dreaming or Meditation may substitute for Will and suffer no penalty for lack of distractions.

Sustained Mental Exertion

Doing the same thing for extended periods, especially if boring and/or repetitive, induces stress. Any situation which requires absolute focus for a number of hours equal to (Will + 2) causes the loss of 1 SP: computer programming, research, Concept rolls for new inventions, long-distance travel (if driving or walking), studying, and other similar situations (in particular, anything that gets a bonus from Attentive or Single-Minded). Add an additional SP for each of the following applicable situations:

- If the skill being used is Hard or Very Hard.
- You are rolling against penalties of -10 or more.
- You are working hastily (penalties of -5 or more for *Time Spent,* p. B346).
- You are engaged in Intensive Training (p. B293).
- You are using a typically non-combat skill in combat or other hazardous situation.

The GM may allow a Will roll to reduce this penalty by 1 SP plus an extra SP per three points of margin of success. Single-Minded and Attentive give their bonus to this roll. Those with Obsession for a task they are working on receive +3 to this roll.

If the GM is using *Improvement Through Study* (p. B292), apply -1 per point of SP below 12 when engaged in *Intensive Training* (p. B293); Grounded and Very Grounded (p. 8) offset this penalty.

> *I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity.*
>
> *– Edgar Allan Poe*

EFFECTS OF LOST STABILITY

When you lose too many SP, *bad* things happen.

Less Than 1/3 SP to 1 SP

You begin suffering from "mental shock." Below 1/3 SP (but more than 1 SP), *halve* your Will to resist mental intrusion, psychic assault, and similar circumstances. You *also* suffer -3 on:

- Self-control rolls (or Will rolls to resist disadvantages if using that optional rule; see *I Have No Control,* p. 5).
- Withdrawal rolls (see also *Drug Use and Withdrawal,* p. 5).
- IQ or Perception rolls that rely on being focused.
- Skill rolls.
- Influence rolls.
- DX rolls that require steady hands (e.g., working on clockwork).
- Some HT rolls (e.g., sexual performance)
- Will rolls to resist fear from startling events (pp. 5-6).

0 SP to -1×SP

Your grip on reality is fading, and you are only holding it together through sheer stubbornness and mental fortitude. At 0 SP, you suffer -8 to all rolls listed under *Less Than 1/3 SP to 1 SP* (above) *and* you must make a Will roll. If you fail, one of the following happens (GM's decision).

- You experience a debilitating affliction for seconds (possibly modified) equal to your margin of failure: dazed (×2 duration); hallucinating (×2 duration); paralysis (×0.75 duration); or unconsciousness (×0.5 duration). See p. B428 for what these effects result in game mechanically.
- You suffer an irritating affliction for minutes (possibly modified) equal to your margin of failure: drunk (×25 duration); nauseated (×14 duration); pain (×25 duration for moderate pain, ×12 for severe pain, ×8 for terrible pain); or stunning (×50 duration). See p. B428 for what effects actually occur.
- You suffer the effects of an appropriate mental disadvantage for minutes equal to your margin of failure. The value of this disadvantage is -5 points per *three* points (round down, minimum of -5 points) of your margin of failure. Combat Paralysis, Cowardice, and Post-Combat Shakes are especially appropriate if currently engaged in battle.
- You suffer 1d LSP gain *immediately* – with no other effects.

Upon recovering Stability Points (see below), you regain a *fragile* grip and may act normally until you lose more than 1/2 your SP in further damage (a mental "major wound"). Every second you're performing mentally stressful actions (like combat!), make another roll with the usual results. Taking Do Nothing actions negates this and represents a mild "fugue state"; remaining in this state for at least (20 - Will) minutes has the same effect as recovering from a faint.

The GM may also wish to consider using the tables from *Fright and Madness Checks* (***Horror***, pp. 143-144) for a random approach to results of weakening stability.

-1×SP or Less

You are courting permanent mental damage. Upon reaching -1×SP, you must make an immediate Will roll to avoid permanent damage, but gain 1d LSP even if you succeed! For every three points by which you succeed on this roll (or if you critically succeed), reduce the final LSP gain by 1 (to a minimum of 1 LSP gained).

Failure results in *permanently* lost traits or new or worsened disadvantages with a character point value equal to 1/3 the margin of failure (2/3 for a critical failure), rounded for the worse. Roll again for every multiple of SP lost (e.g., at -2×SP, -3×SP, and so on), with no limit. Further, the penalty on the listed rolls under *Less Than 1/3 SP to 1 SP* (above) starts at -8 *and* each multiple of SP lost decreases it by another -2 (e.g., -10 at -1×SP, -12 at -2×SP, and so on). There is no limit to this and characters could lose -17×SP and have to make *17* Will rolls to avoid permanent mental damage!

Harsher SP Loss Penalties

The GM who prefers a sliding scale for penalties due to SP loss can use the following: Use the absolute value of lost SP to determine penalties to self-control rolls, skill rolls, etc. This can become perverse as those with more SP have more to lose by suffering greater penalties, but this may be exactly the GM wants for his campaign. Even more optionally, the GM may decide that SP are based on a "Sanity Attribute," which starts at 10 and costs ±10 points a level. All rolls to resist SP loss, shed LSP, etc. are based on this statistic. This optional rule is meant for games where brainy professors and former Marines start on the same footing. Being smarter doesn't necessarily make you well-adjusted or resistant to delusions!

REGAINING STABILITY POINTS

As long as you are above 0 SP, you regain one Stability Point for every 10 minutes in a relaxing situation (defined as any situation in which +4 or more for "routine tasks," p. B345, would apply). Much as a meal while resting restores an extra FP, certain indulgences (massage, sex, brandy, etc.) restore one extra SP. Long-Term Stability Points affect this maximum in the normal way (p. 4) and may limit the number of points you gain back.

If you are at 0 SP or less, but above -1xSP, you recover 1 Stability Point per *hour* instead of every 10 minutes. If you are at or below -1×SP, you must instead roll versus Will *daily* to recover SP, at a rate of 1 per day – once above that limit, you recover SP normally.

Recovering Long-Term Stability Points requires a Will roll on a daily basis where you do nothing but relax. You regain 1 point per day. This is independent of any SP regained.

Grounded (p. 8) and some types of Healing (p. 8) can modify this recovery amount. Additionally, a trained therapist can help you recover lost SP or LSP much faster than you could on your own. Use the rules for *Medical Care* (p. B424), substituting Psychology (or some forms of Esoteric Medicine) for Physician, and Will for HT.

Meditation might allow the rapid recovery of SP at the GM's option. Use the rules for Breath Control (p. B182), except SP are regained instead of FP. Optionally, the GM might permit these benefits to be extended to other skills as appropriate. For example, a truly devout person might use Religious Ritual or Theology to steady themselves with their faith and thus regain SP faster than they otherwise could. Environments might give a bonus to this roll. For example, being in a quiet cabin by a lake or at a cathedral might count as "hospital" care, but only for recovering SP.

In a cinematic game, the GM may allow those with certain training or abilities (Empathy, high Leadership or Psychology, some forms of Esoteric Medicine, etc.) to engage in "mental" First Aid. By taking a minute to interact with the subject (the exact circumstances could be anything from a brief pressure-point massage to a rousing speech, or similar) and rolling against the relevant skill you can restore a single SP *and* immediately end any temporary condition resulting from, e.g., a failed Will roll when at 0 SP or less, side effect of Stability Attacks (see *Innate Attack*, below), etc. This time may be reduced using the standard rules for *Time Spent* (p. B346); an instantaneous (and cinematic) example might be a well-placed slap in the face! If you take an extra 30 minutes to further communicate with the subject in depth – a short session of psychoanalysis or guided meditation, violent exercise, or numerous other possibilities – you can restore an extra 1d SP.

For another way of dealing with stressful situations, see ***Hysteria, Fainting, and the Vapors*** *in* ***GURPS Steampunk 1: Settings and Style.***

New Advantages

The following new advantages use the rules for Stability Points.

Grounded

5 or 15 points

Your resistance to mental stress is much greater than your Will would otherwise indicate. This trait comes in two levels.

Grounded: Your penalties from low SP (see *Less Than 1/3 SP to 1 SP,* p. 7) are reduced by -1; this never gives a net bonus. You also recover SP at twice the normal rate. Finally, you get +5 to your effective Will when rolling to see if you shed Long-Term Stability Points. *Prerequisite:* Will 10+. *5 points*.

Very Grounded: As above, but the penalties are reduced by -2. In addition, you *lose* SP at only half the normal rate. When you roll to recover from Long-Term Stability Point loss, a successful Will roll means you recover *two* points, not one. *Prerequisite*: Will 12+. *15 points.*

Existing Advantages

The following existing advantages use the rules for Stability Points.

Damage Resistance

see p. B45

The following new special modifier is available for campaigns that use Stability Points.

New Special Limitation

Mental Resilience: Whenever you suffer SP loss, subtract your level of DR *before* you multiply for the type of SP loss (see below). It also *adds* to any DR you have for the purposes of purely mental attacks such as those from psychic powers (e.g., Mental Stab) or spells (e.g., Terror). The GM sets the upper limit for this advantage or if it's even available in the first place. *+100%.*

Healing

see p. B59

Those with Healing can restore SP instead of HP with the following enhancement.

New Special Enhancement

Psychiatric Healing: You can temporarily alleviate someone's mental maladies. This requires an IQ roll at a penalty equal to the cost of the disadvantage(s) "healed" divided by 5. Success indicates that the person can ignore the effects of the illness for one hour per point by which you succeed your margin; afterward, the sickness affects the person normally. Extended Duration (p. B105) can be added to Healing to increase this time. If the GM allows, Permanent Durations may be possible. When combined with the rules in this article, every point of FP spent restores 1 SP (if 0 or above). For SP levels in the negatives, add an additional required FP to heal 1 SP per multiple or fraction thereof (e.g., if you were at -3×SP it would take 4 FP per SP healed). Healing LSP requires *5* FP per point restored. Add Empathic (-50%) if you *take on* your target's SP instead of healing it. Add Cure Affliction (+60%) if you can restore traits lost to negative SP loss. *+100%.*

New Special Limitation

Psychiatric Healing Only: You can *only* temporarily alleviate someone's mental maladies. *+0%.*

Innate Attack

see p. B66

The GM may allow a "Stability Attack" that is priced with (and uses the rules for) Innate Attacks that sap Fatigue. Among other things, this means that normal DR applies to the attack! Other modifiers that are applicable to Fatigue Attacks that also make sense for Stability Attacks may be taken as well. For example, "Stability Attack 1d (Hazard, Missed Sleep, +50%) [15]" would cause 1d of SP loss, which could only be regained through sleep after figuring in any applicable Mental Resilience! This is similar to Terror, but represents a direct attack on the sanity of the subject!

New Special Enhancements

Maddening: You double the SP loss after accounting for Mental Resilience and other protective traits. For example, if you target had Mental Resilience 3 and you inflicted 7 SP damage on your target, you'd cause him to lose *8* SP, not 4. *+50%.*

Mental Defense Only: Your Stability Attack ignores armor; only DR with the Mental Resilience enhancement protects. However, the target's Mind Shield (if any) provides additional DR equal to its level. *+250%*

Sanity-Blasting: Instead of just losing SP, your target gains LSP (which indirectly causes SP loss as well). *+300%.*

Resistant

see p. B80

Resistant to Mental Stress is a Very Common category and is on par with Resistant to Metabolic Hazards. This advantage's bonus adds when making Will rolls to determine SP loss, rolls to see what happens when you go into negative SP, and so on. Unfazeable is effectively "Resistant to Mental Stress (+8)."

Terror

see p. B93

Terror causes an immediate Will roll to resist fear (pp. 5-6), with each -1 to normal Fright Checks translating as -1 to Will rolls. The Maddening and Sanity-Blasting modifiers (see *Innate Attack,* p. 8) can be added to increase the amount of SP lost to this ability.

NEW DISADVANTAGE

The following new disadvantages use the rules for Stability Points.

Unhinged

-5/level

Your resistance to mental stress is much less than your Will would otherwise indicate. Each level (maximum three levels) shifts the time period to regain SP (pp. 7-8) one step: minutes become hours, hours become days, days become weeks, and weeks become months. For example, Unhinged 2 would result in you gaining 1 SP per day even if your SP was above 0.

Each level also doubles the time allowed between Psychology rolls when under the care of a competent psychologist for the purposes of regaining SP or LSP (pp. 7-8).

NEW MODIFIER

The following new modifier uses the rules for Stability Points.

Destabilizing

+20%/level or +0%/level

This modifier is only for disadvantages with a self-control roll or, at the GM's discretion, those with a similar "control" roll such as Chronic Pain. When you fail a self-control roll for this disadvantage, your SP loss from *Mental Disturbance* (p. 6) is increased by your Destabilizing level. This is worth +20% per level, or +0% if your Destabilizing level also adds to your SP regained when voluntarily giving into this disadvantage.

Advantages that drain SP or inflict LSP should instead add Costs Fatigue or Costs Hit Points, per *Fueling Supernatural Powers and Defending Against Attacks* (p. 6).

EXAMPLE ABILITIES

Some creatures can directly attack a target's mind, reducing their Stability Point total. Here are just a few ways they could do that.

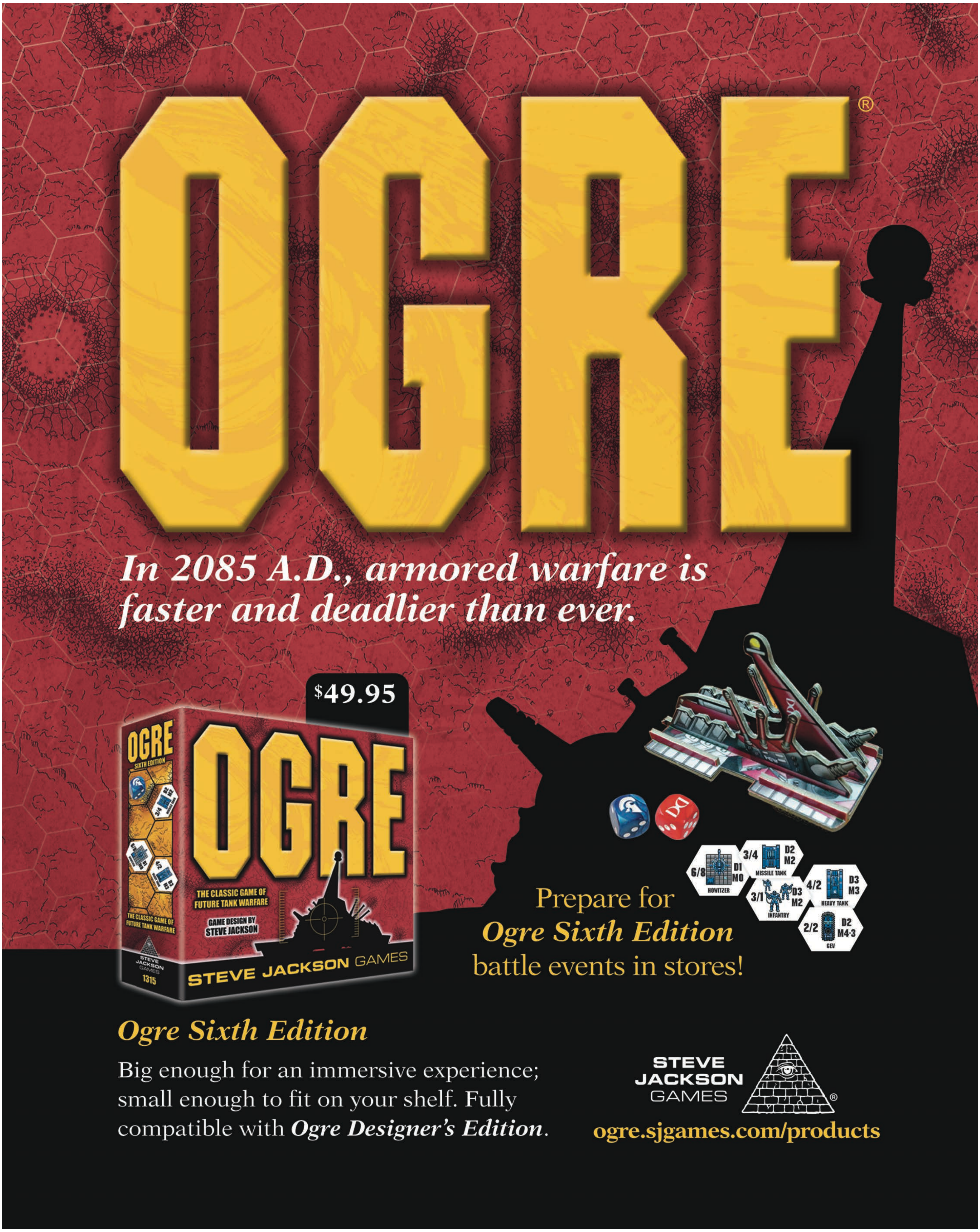
Aura of Madness (+460%): Stability Attack 1d (Always On, -40%; Area Effect, 16 yards, +200%; Aura, +80%; Melee Attack, Reach C, -30%; Mental Defense Only, +250%) [56]. *Notes:* Everyone within 16 yards of suffers 1d points of SP damage per second; this is reduced only by DR with Mental Resilience and Mind Shield. *31 points.*

Breath of the Elder One (+1,040%): Stability Attack 3d (Cosmic, No Die Roll Required, +100%; Cosmic, No Active Defense Allowed, +300%; Cosmic, Irresistible Attack, +300%; Increased Range, LOS, +40%; Sanity-Blasting, +300%) [114]. *Notes:* Inflicts 3d SP and LSP that requires no roll to hit as long as effective skill is 3 or higher, allows no active defense, ignores Mental Resilience, *and* lost SP is doubled after the damage is rolled. *342 points.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher R. Rice remembers hearing the phrase "mad as bones" from his grandmother as a child (and hasn't heard it since). This article is dedicated to her; may she rest in peace. Consider donating to the Alzheimer's Association, **alz.org,** to help against a rapidly growing epidemic). From Portsmouth, Virginia, he's spinning words and whimsy into gold. Of course, if he's not writing about ***GURPS,*** he's blogging about it. Visit his site "Ravens N' Pennies" (**www.ravensnpennies.com**) for more ***GURPS*** goodies. He wishes to thank L.A., his own personal muse, as well as the rest of his gaming group (the Headhunters); Beth "Archangel" McCoy, the "Sith Editrix"; Blake Chapman; Scott "Rocket Man" Rochat; and Douglas Cole for being most excellent sounding boards. A special thanks to Patrick "Celti" Burroughs who helped to make this system what it is – thank you, Patrick.

> ***Dave:*** *What do you think it's like, Father?*
>
> ***Father Shellnut:*** *What's what like?*
>
> ***Dave:*** *Being crazy, mentally ill.*
>
> ***Father Shellnut:*** *Well, they never know they're ill, do they? I mean, you can't diagnose yourself with the same organ that has the disease, just like you can't see your own eyeball. I suppose you just feel regular, and the rest of the world seems to go crazy around you.*
>
> – ***John Dies at the End***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MONSTERS' MINIONS

BY MICHELE ARMELLINI

Hunters of monsters and investigators of the occult know this: the unspeakable abominations would not get very far, save for the fact that they can always recruit helpers from among us. Demons have worshippers, vampires have servants running errands in daylight, mummies have cultists – all minions of the monsters, who choose to betray their own kind.

Sometimes they are just cannon fodder, no real match for monster slayers, but willing to sacrifice themselves just to delay the heroes a few seconds. Others are skilled, cunning, and lethal.

This line-up describes several detailed examples of minions. The being controlling them is referred to as their Master. They are especially suitable for use with the main adversaries in the ***GURPS Monster Hunters*** setting, but they may come in handy in many other present-day supernatural, horror, or conspiracy campaigns. The GM may want to design and customize his own archvillain, but the rank and file is here, ready to use.

READING THE WRITE-UPS

These despicable renegades aren't presented by full character sheets, but in a summarized form. However, the damage they can inflict with various attacks is listed, since most of them will be used in combat. Key traits and skills are offered, and the equipment listed is only the *notable* stuff they have at hand. As always, the GM should feel free to add details.

If cinematic optional rules are used, any minion offered here and built on 100 points or less would be considered nothing more than *Cannon Fodder* (see p. B417) or *Mooks* (see ***GURPS Monster Hunters 2: The Mission***, p. 20).

When a GM designs a villain that can rely on these followers, they should be counted as Allies or Ally Groups for him – obviously with the Minion Enhancement (see p. B38)!

THE EXTRA

That cult would never die.

*– H.P. Lovecraft, **The Call of Cthulhu***

This is the most basic form of minion – not even a proper cultist. Maybe he could be called a cultist wannabe, possibly a recent recruit of an ageless tradition.

Nameless Acolyte

40 points

Demon worshippers, followers of elder beings, witches . . . they all love to form covens. This is a typical member; probably already flawed to start with, and that's why he was an easy prey. Additionally, the more time he spends with the cult, the more deranged he'll get.

Whatever his Master is, this acolyte will be used as a source of FP for casting spells and as a sentry, servant, bodyguard, or human-wave attacker.

Motivation: Fanaticism.

Tactics: Anything that his Master will demand; if without orders, he will keep attacking any intruder.

Weaknesses: Not a skilled fighter.

ST 11; **DX** 11; **IQ** 10; **HT** 12.

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 13; Will 11; Per 11; FP 12.
Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 8.
SM 0; 5'8"; 160 lbs.

Auto Pistol, .45 (13): 2d large piercing (see p. B278).
Bite or Punch (11): 1d-2 crushing. Reach C.
Kick (9): 1d-1 crushing. Reach C, 1.

Traits: Bad Temper (12); Fanaticism (Cult); High Pain Threshold; Odious Personal Habit (Poor hygiene).

Skills: Brawling-11; Broadsword-11; Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-13; Hidden Lore (appropriate for Master)-10; Occultism-10.

Notes: This is inspired by the cultist thug template (see ***GURPS Monster Hunters 3: The Enemy***, p. 31), but he is *less* proficient. Maybe he'll reach the template level if he serves the cult for long enough.

Equipment: Auto pistol, .45 ($300, 3 lbs.), ordinary clothes, ($120, 2 lbs.).

THE HEAD ENFORCER

I'm a gangster, and gangsters don't ask questions.

– Lil Wayne

Run-of-the-mill cultists are fine as non-thinking muscle. But when their Master isn't around, they need someone to lead them. The head enforcer is the monster's lieutenant – as devoted as the others, but more dangerous.

Monster Hunter Muscle

The nameless acolyte and the head enforcer are particularly suitable for a ***GURPS Monster Hunters*** campaign. In that setting, the heroes are up to facing vampires and demons, therefore even these much humbler adversaries are remarkably powerful as cultists go. In a low-key horror campaign, pitting common people against evil, these thugs should be downsized; they should not be this strong, and they would likely be less smart.

Sharky Z

125 points

A big man with a criminal background (under the little-known real name of Zacharias Lincoln), he's a devoted minion of a powerful ghost infesting a whole slum. His Master prefers using mundane guards – Sharky's gang – as a first line of defense against any threat.

Sharky is feared both for his berserking and because bad, *weird* things sometimes happen to his enemies. He's well-connected within the local underworld.

Motivation: The ghost aids Sharky with the occasional supernatural "push" when needed, thus gaining his utter loyalty. What makes the minion particularly happy about this arrangement is that the ghost's need for secrecy means nobody knows that Sharky actually isn't the boss.

Tactics: Sharky loves drive-by shootings and any set-up where his goons serve as a gambit providing him with better chances to hit. When berserk, he goes out of control.

An assortment of traitors of humankind

Weaknesses: He underestimates female opponents and can be easily provoked with taunts about his real name.

ST 13; **DX** 12; **IQ** 11; **HT** 13.
Damage 1d/2d-1; BL 34 lbs.; HP 15; Will 11; Per 12; FP 14.
Basic Speed 6.25; Basic Move 6; Dodge 9; Parry 10 (Brawling)/9 (Broadsword).
SM 0; 6'0"; 185 lbs.

Auto Pistol, .44M (14): 3d large piercing (see p. B278).
Broadsword (13): 2d cutting *or* 1d+1 crushing. Reach 1.
Bite or Punch (14): 1d crushing. Reach C.
Kick (12): 1d+1 crushing. Reach C, 1.

Traits: Berserk (Battle Rage) (12); Bully (12); Chauvinistic; Contact (Street contact; Effective skill 15; 9 or less; Somewhat Reliable); Fanaticism (Master); Hates his real name; High Pain Threshold; Odious Personal Habit (Non-stop profanity); Reputation +2 (Fearsome gang leader; to the underworld); Social Stigma (Criminal Record).
Skills: Brawling-14; Broadsword-13; Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-14; Hidden Lore (Restless Undead)-11; Occultism-11; Scrounging-12; Streetwise-12; Tactics-11; Urban Survival-11; Wrestling-13.
Notes: Sharky is built on the Cultist Thug template (see ***Monster Hunters 3,*** p. 31); he's just a bit more intelligent and gifted.
Equipment: Auto pistol, .44m ($750, 4.5 lbs.), broadsword ($500, 3 lbs.), boots (DR 2*, feet, $80, 3 lbs.), leather jacket (DR 1*, arms, torso, $50, 4 lbs.), cell phone ($250, 0.25 lbs.).

THE LIVING AUTOMATON

Where you gonna hide?
– Carol Malone, in ***Body Snatchers***

It's the invasion of the body snatchers! A trope, but still a challenge.

Charles Barrymore

60 points

Charlie Barrymore is a sheriff deputy, and he's in good shape. Those are probably the reasons why an alien parasite has chosen him as his host. Nothing is known about his personality – but that doesn't matter, as he is, at present, entirely controlled by a Master that sits in his brain and blood stream.

Motivation: Charlie has no motivation. His Master just wants survival, and if the host dies, the parasite dies, too. The being is not looking for trouble, but maybe trouble – the heroes – will come looking for it.

Tactics: Charlie's Master will try to keep his host alive, backing off from fights it can't win, and using delaying tactics if pursued. It might chose a confrontation, and exploit the clout of police authority, if it feels it's in a position of force. If faced by a lone busybody, it might kill that person, plant the untraceable revolver, and then calmly go through the paperwork. When push comes to shove, it will make Charlie bite another living being – that's the way it moves from one body to another.

Weaknesses: Magic or drugs could temporarily impair the Master's control upon Charlie. If that happens, he remains burdened with Slave Mentality (that is, unable to take decisions on his own). Experimental drugs or brain surgery *might* remove the parasite for good.

ST 13; **DX** 12; **IQ** 11; **HT** 12.
Damage 1d/2d-1; BL 34 lbs.; HP 14; Will 11; Per 11; FP 12.
Basic Speed 6.00; Basic Move 6; Dodge 9; Parry 9.
SM 0; 5'11"; 185 lbs.

Auto Pistol, .40 (14): 2d large piercing (see p. B278).
Auto Shotgun, 12G (12): 1d+1 piercing (see p. B279).
Baton (12): 2d-1 crushing *or* 1d crushing. Reach 1.
Bite or Punch (13): 1d-1 crushing. Reach C.
Kick (11): 1d crushing. Reach C, 1.
Snub Revolver, .38 (14): 1d+2 piercing (see p. B278).

Traits: Duty (Sheriff's Department; 15 or less); Fit; Legal Enforcement Powers 1; Police Rank 1; Reprogrammable; Secret (Parasite-controlled; Imprisonment or Exile); Slave Mentality.
Skills: Area Knowledge (Local)-12; Brawling-13; Driving/TL8 (Automobile)-11; Fast-Talk-10; Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-14; Intimidation-11; Law (Criminal)-10; Savoir-Faire (Police)-11; Shortsword-12; Streetwise-10.

Notes: Some of the equipment listed below is in his car's trunk. He also has lots of other standard-issue – and non-standard – stuff around, up to the GM.

Equipment: Auto pistol, .40 ($640, 2.1 lbs.) with ammo (×2), .40 ($28, 1.4 lbs.), auto shotgun, 12g ($950, 8.4 lbs.), baton ($20, 1 lb.), snub revolver, .38 (untraceable, $250, 1.5 lbs.), heavy flashlight ($20, 1 lb.), handcuffs ($40, 0.5 lbs.), handheld radio, ($100, 1 lb.), ballistic vest (DR 8/2*, torso, $400, 2 lbs.), boots (DR 2*, feet, $80, 3 lbs.), uniform ($120, 2 lbs.).

THE GUN-FREE MUSCLEMAN

God hath given you one face, and you make yourself another.
– William Shakespeare, ***Hamlet***

This is a specialized fighter who is particularly suitable for his Master, a skin-changer. This monster has had too many skins ruined by bullets, so he prefers living in places where guns are not allowed; as of late, he's "become" the boss of a private security company in a major airport. He always selects minions that are easy to deceive thanks to his unique ability.

Steven Carson

130 points

Steven is a giant (7'1" tall) working as a security guard. While there are a few handgun-equipped policemen in the airport, Steven and his colleagues aren't issued with firearms, but he doesn't need them: quarrels peter out when he's seen.

Unfortunately, he's very simple-minded, does things by the book, and always obeys his company's boss, that is, the skin-changer.

Motivation: Steven earnestly does his duty as ordered by his boss: he doesn't know the latter was replaced by the skin-changer!

Tactics: He will apply a gradual escalation of force, trying to avoid permanent damage.

Weaknesses: Just as he was easily fooled by his Master, he could be deceived by the champions.

ST 15; **DX** 13; **IQ** 9; **HT** 12.
Damage 1d+1/2d+1; BL 45 lbs.; HP 16; Will 9; Per 9; FP 12.
Basic Speed 6.25; Basic Move 7; Dodge 9; Parry 10.
SM 1; 7'1"; 290 lbs.

Baton (14): 2d+1 crushing *or* 1d+1 crushing. Reach 1.
Bite or Punch (14): 1d crushing. Reach C, 1.
Kick (12): 1d+1 crushing. Reach C, 1.
Pepper Spray (14): See ***GURPS High Tech***, p. 180.

Traits: Damage Resistance 1 (Tough Skin); Duty (Security company; 12 or less); Fit; Gigantism; Gullibility (9); Hidebound; Legal Enforcement Powers 1; Overweight; Pacifism (Reluctant Killer).

Skills: Area Knowledge (Airport)-10; Arm Lock (Wrestling)-15; Brawling-14; Law (Airport regulations)-9; Liquid Projector/TL8 (Sprayer)-14; Observation-10; Savoir-Faire (Police)-11; Search-10; Shortsword-14; Wrestling-14.

Equipment: Baton ($20, 1 lb.), pepper spray ($15, neg.), ordinary clothes ($120, 2 lbs.), handcuffs ($40, 0.5 lbs.), radio ($100, 1 lb.).

THE EXPENDABLE PAWN

Steel isn't strong, boy, flesh is stronger!
– Thulsa Doom, in ***Conan the Barbarian***

Some monsters are willing (or desperate enough) to use *any* human material they can gain control over. The least valuable pawn has one advantage: it's expendable. He is the entirely enthralled minion that will wear an explosive vest, or mindlessly charge at his Master's enemies, or happily provide his vital energy. He's a human weapon.

> *All spirits are enslaved*
> *which serve things evil.*
> *– Percy Bysshe Shelley,*
> ***Prometheus Unbound***

Robin Staple

-20 points

A forgettable, average boy, Robin is a high-school dropout who works as a delivery van driver. He was always interested in paranormal, psychic phenomena, but not bright enough to avoid asking too many questions. So he discovered a mind-controlling rogue psi – and fell under his control.

Now Robin runs errands for his Master, including keeping an eye on the streets. While he is no challenge for any champion, he can't be entirely dismissed, given his willingness to launch a suicide attack.

Motivation: Robin will simply do whatever the rogue psi wants him to.

Tactics: If committed to combat, Robin will use suicide tactics. He may drive his van into the heroes' car, and then fire his revolver or any other gun. Or if the PCs attack the psi's hideout, he'll serve as a human shield.

Weaknesses: Anything that breaks the mind control will leave Robin extremely confused and harmless.

ST 10; **DX** 11; **IQ** 10; **HT** 9.
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 11; Per 11; FP 9.
Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 8.
SM 0; 5'6"; 140 lbs.

Bite or Punch (11): 1d-3 crushing. Reach C.
Kick (9): 1d-2 crushing. Reach C, 1.
Revolver, .36 (7): 2d-1 piercing (see p. B278).

Traits: Bad Sight (Nearsighted; Correctable); Duty (Master; 15 or less; Extremely Hazardous; Involuntary); Fanaticism (Master; Extreme); Fearlessness 3; Forgettable Face; Pitiable; Wealth (Struggling).

Skills: Area Knowledge (Local)-10; Current Affairs/TL8 (Popular Culture)-10; Driving/TL8 (Automobile)-12; Expert Skill (Psionics)-9.

Equipment: Revolver, .36 ($150, 2.5 lbs.), ordinary clothes ($120, 2 lbs.), cell phone ($250, 0.25 lbs.).

Sadly, one of the greatest threats facing the world is that of other humans.

– GURPS Monster Hunters 3: The Enemy

The Hitman

Kill for my masters.

– David Berkowitz

Many Masters prefer preemptive strikes, and simple tools are the best for those.

Thomas Wilder

55 points

He's a serial killer. Not an organized, brilliant murderer – he would have been caught a long time ago, were it not for the fact that a demon offered him a deal. Wilder would be granted supernatural luck and occasional help in pursuing his pastime; in turn, he would also kill to order.

Wilder is a forensic technician for the local coroner. This may give him insider information on crimes. He has been an EMT worker, too, and can pass off as an ambulance driver or nurse to deceive potential victims; he usually drugs them in order to kidnap them. He has his sort of fun with them for a few days, before dumping them in a river.

If the demon gets wind that somebody is on the hunt, it will send Wilder to counterattack.

Motivation: Indulging himself.

Tactics: Wilder will only strike by surprise. He'll withdraw from an open fight, and he'll rely on his luck.

Weaknesses: If identified, he has no plan B, and he's not much of an opponent once his luck runs out.

ST 10; **DX** 11; **IQ** 11; **HT** 11.
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 11; Per 11; FP 11.
Basic Speed 5.50; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 8.
SM 0; 5'7"; 150 lbs.

Bite or Punch (11): 1d-3 crushing. Reach C.
Dagger (12): 1d-3 impaling. Reach C.
Kick (9): 1d-2 crushing. Reach C, 1.
Revolver, .38 (12): 2d-1 large piercing (see p. B278).

Traits: Duty (Master; 9 or less); Extraordinary Luck; Lecherousness (12); Patron (Master; 6 or less; Special Abilities); Sadism (12); Secret (Serial Killer; Possible Death).

Skills: Acting-12; Area Knowledge (Local)-11; Driving/TL8 (Automobile)-11; First Aid/TL8 (Human)-13; Forensics/TL8-11; Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-12; Hidden Lore (Demon Lore)-11; Knife-12; Pharmacy/TL8 (Synthetic)-11; Scrounging-11.

Equipment: Dagger ($20, 0.25 lbs.), revolver, .38 ($400, 2 lbs.), crash kit ($200, 10 lbs.), ordinary clothes ($120, 2 lbs.), rope (3/8", 10 yards, $5, 1.5 lbs.).

The Knight From Elsewhen

Have you heard of the janissaries?

– Nazmi Kemal, in ***The Reluctant Fundamentalist***

Some monsters have found that the best soldier is the rootless one, because he has nowhere else to turn save to his Master.

Heinrich von Rusdorf

210 points

One day he was on a battlefield with his knightly comrades in the well-known Chelm region, in the year of our Lord 1477. Seconds later, he was elsewhere, his warhorse and shield both lost, facing strangely clad men who talked gibberish and had small cannons in their hands. The disembodied voice he could hear and understand told him that his only hope of getting back to his world, his barony, his family . . . was to fight these strangers and win.

Baron von Rusdorf was kidnapped by a Master having unusual reach across time and space – maybe a world-jumper. This villain has a policy of pitting low-tech but aggressive warriors taken from alternate timelines against his own enemies. Von Rusdorf has little alternative but to fight.

Motivation: Going back home.

Tactics: The baron will simply close in on the nearest foe.

Weaknesses: If he were credibly offered another way to go back to his family, von Rusdorf would no longer have a reason to fight. But communicating and negotiating with him will be hard.

ST 16; **DX** 13; **IQ** 11; **HT** 13.
Damage 1d+1/2d+2; BL 51 lbs.; HP 16; Will 12; Per 11; FP 13.
Basic Speed 6.50; Basic Move 7; Move 5; Dodge 9; Parry 12.
SM 0; 5'10; 175 lbs.

Axe (13): 2d+4 cutting. Reach 1.
Broadsword (16): 2d+3 cutting *or* 1d+2 crushing. Reach 1.
Bite (13): 1d crushing. Reach C.
Punch (13): 1d+1 crushing (with gauntlets). Reach C.
Kick (11): 1d+1 crushing (with sollerets). Reach C, 1.

Traits: Combat Reflexes; Dependent (Family; 6 or less; Loved ones); Duty (Teutonic Order; 12 or less); Fearlessness 2; Intolerance (Total); Low TL -4; Status +4; Style Familiarity (High Medieval); Wealth (Wealthy).

Skills: Axe/Mace-13; Broadsword-16; Heraldry-10; Lance-15; Leadership-12; Navigation/TL4 (Land)-10; Riding (Equines)-14; Savoir-Faire-11; Shield-15; Survival (Plains)-11; Tactics-11; Wrestling-13.

Notes: Encumbrance is Light. Parry is 10U with Axe/Mace. The only language spoken is Ancient Prussian (Native). This character is especially suitable for a monster-hunting campaign in the ***GURPS Infinite Worlds*** setting.

Equipment: Axe ($50, 4 lbs.), broadsword ($500, 3 lbs.), gauntlets (DR 4, hands, $100, 2 lbs.), greathelm (DR 7, face, neck, skull, $340, 10 lbs.), plate arms (DR 6, arms, $1,000, 15 lbs.), plate legs (DR 6, legs, $1,100, 20 lbs.), sollerets (DR 4, feet, $150, 7 lbs.), steel corselet (DR 6, groin, torso, $1,300, 35 lbs.).

THE DEAL SEEKER

I am altering the deal. Pray I don't alter it any further.
– Darth Vader, in ***Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back***

Some humans go *looking* for the monsters, not to kill them, but in the misguided hope that they can negotiate with them.

Shirley Tate

115 points

Shirley was an intelligence agent, but not a "Man In Black" tasked with destroying monsters. She is an analyst who would give the MIBs their intelligence.

But now she's terminally ill, she left her employer, and she's looking for a monster who will heal her. She believes she can come to a reasonable agreement with a powerful witch, a demon, or even a vampire.

The fact that she isn't already in thrall to a Master leaves room for different developments. It also might pit her against the PCs as a competitor, at least initially, instead of as a direct foe, as she is looking for the same monster as them. Additionally, her agency is on her heels, which could bring about a perfect storm, a four-sided crossfire (the heroes, the monster and its current minions, Shirley, and the MIBs sent to liquidate her).

Motivation: Escaping death.

Tactics: The very awareness that monsters exist spurred Shirley to acquire her self-defense skills, but that's exactly how she'll use them, avoiding any fight if possible. That is, until a new Master demands more.

Weaknesses: Shirley might still see reason and overcome her Delusion, or be offered a cure by someone else.

ST 11; **DX** 11; **IQ** 13; **HT** 9.
Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11; Will 13; Per 14; FP 9.
Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 9.
SM 0; 5'7"; 145 lbs.

Auto Pistol, .40 (13): 2d large piercing (see p. B278).
Bite (11): 1d-2 crushing. Reach C.
Punch (12): 1d crushing. Reach C.
Kick (10): 1d+1 crushing. Reach C, 1.

Traits: Appearance (Attractive); Bad Sight (Nearsighted; Correctable); Contact Group (Occultists; Effective Skill 15; 9 or less; Somewhat Reliable); Danger Sense; Delusion ("Negotiating with monsters is possible"); Enemy (Her agency; 6 or less); Honest Face; Terminally Ill (Up to two years); Truth-Seeker 3; Wealth (Comfortable).

Skills: Administration-13; Computer Operation/TL8-15; Current Affairs/TL8 (Headline News)-14; Detect Lies-16*; Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-13; Hidden Lore (Conspiracies)-16*; Intelligence Analysis/TL8-17*; Interrogation-16*; Karate-12; Observation-15; Occultism-15; Research/TL8-18*.

Equipment: Auto pistol, .40 ($640, 2.1 lbs.), cell phone ($250, 0.25 lbs.), laptop computer ($1,500, 3 lbs.), ordinary clothes (Status +1, $240, 2 lbs.).

* Includes +3 from Truth-Seeker 3.

THE MISGUIDED LOVER

The things we won't do for love!
– Tracy Chapman, "For My Lover"

Some monsters don't need supernatural powers to turn hapless humans into minions.

Lara Darkblood

120 points

Lara Stockton was just an easy girl and a petty thief, until she met her Master: a civilized, cunning vampire who chooses to hide in plain sight. She fell in love with him and became the queen of a circle of social, fake vampires – a front for the actual ones. Her Master ritually bites her every day, without draining enough blood to infect her (although this gives her an open wound on the neck).

Lara will do *anything* to protect her lover from the "religious fanatics" who threaten their transgressive but harmless mores; she doesn't know that her Master is a *real vampire* who routinely feeds by killing. And if the champions come to investigate the "vampire" scene, she'll do her best to seduce the easiest target, to deceive him, and possibly to deprive him of some essential piece of equipment.

Motivation: Lara is motivated by her unconditional love for her Master.

Tactics: She will single out an opponent that she perceives she could fool, then she'll take him by surprise with her karate – and bites.

Weaknesses: Lara's open wound is a weak point. Also, should she realize she's nothing but a tool, her dedication to her Master would disappear.

ST 11; **DX** 12; **IQ** 12; **HT** 11.
Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11; Will 12; Per 12; FP 11.
Basic Speed 5.75; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 9.
SM 0; 5'5"; 135 lbs.

Bite or Punch (12): 1d-1 crushing. Reach C.
Kick (10): 1d crushing. Reach C, 1.
Knee Strike (12): 1d crushing. Reach C.

Traits: Appearance (Beautiful); Biting Mastery; Compulsive Behavior (Communing with Master) (12); Delusion ("My Master loves me"); Looks good in "vampire" garb; Sense of Duty (Master); Sensitive; Unnatural Feature ("Vampire" implants); Wounded.

Skills: Acting-12; Dancing-12; Fast-Talk-13; Filch-12; Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-13; Holdout-11; Karate-12; Occultism-12; Pickpocket-13; Sex Appeal (Human)-15*.

* Includes +4 from Appearance.

Equipment: No notable equipment apart from "vampire" garb.

THE COLLABORATOR

We've had to kill people.
– Ted Kaczynski

Some humans simply feel they have something in common with the monsters.

Jack Armstrong

110 points

Armstrong earns a living as a wilderness tour guide and hunter. He spends a lot of time in the woods, and this made him aware of werewolves. He is fine with them, because he has no qualms about killing humans; Armstrong himself occasionally chooses to get rid of the worst human threats against his beloved Mother Earth.

The local lycanthropes sense he's friendly and leave him alone. Should monster hunters choose him as their guide into the woods, they'll be in for nasty surprises.

> *Prune: He's found a job.*
>
> *Blossom: Doing what?*
>
> *Prune: Making children happy.*
>
> *Blossom: Oh, horrible, sir.*
>
> – ***The Christmas That Almost Wasn't***

Motivation: Weres are entitled to inherit the land, as far as Armstrong is concerned.

Tactics: He'll never fight openly. He will use traps, preferably explosive ones. He might snipe from afar.

Weaknesses: Armstrong has no short-range or melee combat abilities.

ST 11; **DX** 12; **IQ** 12; **HT** 11.
Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11; Will 13; Per 12; FP 11.
Basic Speed 5.75; Basic Move 5; Move 4; Dodge 7; Parry 9.
SM 0; 5'8"; 155 lbs.

Bite or Punch (12): 1d-2 crushing. Reach C.
Concussion Grenade (9): 5dx2 crushing explosive (see p. B277).
Kick (10): 1d-1 crushing. Reach C, 1.
Large Knife (8): 1d-1 cutting, reach C, 1, *or* 1d-1 impaling, reach C.
Sniper Rifle, .338 (14): 9d+1 piercing (see p. B279).

Traits: Brotherhood (Local weres); Fanaticism (Extreme environmentalism); Outdoorsman 1; Secret (Terrorist; Imprisonment); Stuttering.
Skills: Acting-13; Area Knowledge (Local)-14; Explosives/TL8 (Demolition)-14; Guns/TL8 (Rifle)-14; Hiking-10; Naturalist (Earth)-11*; Navigation/TL8 (Land)-12*; Set Trap (Explosives)-14; Stealth-13; Survival (Woodlands)-14*; Tracking-12; Traps/TL8-13.
Notes: Dodge and Move reflect Light Encumbrance.
Equipment: Concussion grenades (×3, $120, 3 lbs.), large knife ($40, 1 lb.), sniper rifle, .338 ($5,600, 17.5 lbs.) with ammo (×4, .338 ($64, 3.2 lbs.), small backpack ($60, 3 lbs.), boots (DR 2*, feet, $80, 3 lbs.), ordinary clothes ($120, 2 lbs.), canteen ($10, 1 lb.), first aid kit ($50, 2 lbs.), fishhooks and line ($50, neg.), personal basics ($5, 1 lb.), satellite phone ($3,000, 3 lbs.).

* Includes +1 from Outdoorsman.

The Old Family Servant

Master, go on, and I will follow thee.
– William Shakespeare, ***As You Like It***

Even the unworthy may be granted unflinching, unadulterated personal loyalty.

Alfred Jones

70 points

This is the old, trusted servant of the villain. A true English butler, he is the epitome of dignity and unfazeability. He will treat unwanted visitors with distant courtesy.

He is, obviously, a cliché of the genre, but even stereotypes have their uses. Besides, he has an ace in the hole if worst comes to worst, which the adventurers might well not expect of him: he has spent hours in the empty wine cellar, training with his one firearm.

Alfred might serve nearly any kind of monster, provided that it's a kind that comes with a family.

Motivation: The butler is just old-fashionedly loyal to his Master.

Tactics: He'll keep the gun hidden until he can surprise his targets with a sudden burst.

Weaknesses: While having a duty toward the present Master, what is essential is serving the interests of the *family*. If Alfred believes that the Master is betraying his own blood in some way – then all bets are off.

ST 9; **DX** 11; **IQ** 11; **HT** 9.
Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP 9; Will 11; Per 11; FP 9.
Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 8.
SM 0; 5'7"; 150 lbs.

Bite or Punch (11): 1d-3 crushing. Reach C.
Kick (9): 1d-2 crushing. Reach C, 1.
Machine Pistol, 9mm (14): 3d-1 piercing (see p. B278).

Traits: Duty (Master; 15 or less); Hard of Hearing; Indomitable; Patron (Master; 9 or less); Sense of Duty (Master's family); Unfazeable.
Skills: Administration-11; Cooking-13; Current Affairs/TL8 (Local)-11; Guns/TL8 (Submachine Gun)-14; Hidden Lore (appropriate for Master)-13; Housekeeping-12; Occultism-11; Savoir-Faire (Servant)-13.
Equipment: Machine pistol, 9mm ($675, 5.5 lbs.), ordinary clothes ($120, 2 lbs.).

The Believer

The floor of hell is paved with the skulls of bishops.
– Attributed to St. Athanasius

Here is a minion who serves his Master because he devoutly, firmly believes. But what if he believes in something wrong?

Pastor Placid Green

115 points

Pastor Green is a crusader in the making. His Master is an entity that he thinks is an angel. For the time being, he has not been granted evident mystical powers, but he does have a burning true faith. He also gets occasional prophetic dreams (see ***GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions***, p. 23), which may short-circuit the plans of his adversaries.

The pastor successfully exorcised a real demon out of one his flock, but that went to his head; since then, he sees possessions everywhere. He repeatedly used aggressive means in failed attempts to exorcise girls who actually weren't demons' hosts. After the injuries inflicted to a 14-year-old kid, his church booted him out; he's now entirely dependent on his Master, who will point out to him, from time to time, "souls that need saving."

Motivation: When it comes to do his Master's holy bidding, he will stop at nothing.

Tactics: The pastor tries to obtain the approval of the supposed possession victim's family. If necessary, he's not above ambushing, kidnapping, tying and forcibly exorcising her. He keeps the shotgun for self-defense, but anybody opposing him must be evil.

Weaknesses: He's not a fighter and can be distracted. Additionally, staging a convincing "conversion" can lower his guard.

ST 13; **DX** 11; **IQ** 12; **HT** 10.
Damage 1d/2d-1; BL 34 lbs.; HP 13; Will 14; Per 12; FP 10.
Basic Speed 5.25; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 8.
SM 0; 5'8"; 160 lbs.

Bite or Punch (11): 1d-1 crushing. Reach C.
Holy Symbol (11): 1d crushing. Reach C (treated as a sap; counts as a holy attack; see ***Monster Hunters 1,*** p. 57).
Kick (9): 1d crushing. Reach C, 1.
Pump Shotgun, 12G (12): 1d+1 piercing (see p. B279).

Traits: Disciplines of Faith (Mysticism); Distractible; Fanaticism (Religious); Higher Purpose (Defending his version of the faith); Obsession (Exorcising everyone possessed); Prophetic Dreams; Reputation -2 (Demoted by his church; To knowledgeable people); True Faith.
Skills: Exorcism-14; Fast-Talk-12; Guns/TL8 (Shotgun)-12; Hidden Lore (Demon Lore)-12; Intimidation-14; Knot-Tying-11; Public Speaking-13; Religious Ritual (Abrahamic)-12; Theology (Abrahamic)-12; Wrestling-12.

Equipment: Pump shotgun ($240, 8 lbs.), clergy clothing and ritual garb ($200, 2 lbs.), holy symbol ($200, 0.5 lbs.), holy water in canteen ($10, 1 lb.), rope, 3/4" (10 yards, $25, 5 lbs.).

ONE OF THEM!

I'm having a friend for dinner.
– Dr. Hannibal Lecter, in ***The Silence of the Lambs***

Some Masters aren't inhuman, but they are monstrous nonetheless; and their minions may be not unlike them.

Marion Smith

80 points

Sometimes, Champions look for supernatural monstrosity and just find human evil. Marion, her Master, and their companions are one of those cases. Marion is the cook and manager of a small steak house. Regulars may eat special dishes there. Drifters who happen by, especially if Marion assesses that nobody will look for them, are never seen again . . . after the regulars have them for dinner.

Motivation: Marion is one of the eaters.

Tactics: She tries to make potential victims feel at home and canvasses them with idle chatter; then she drugs them with the food. If anything goes wrong, she has some sharp blades at hand, and normally, a resisting victim is partially under the effect of her drugs.

Weaknesses: She's not really skilled with her weapons.

ST 10; **DX** 12; **IQ** 12; **HT** 10.
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 13; Per 12; FP 10.
Basic Speed 5.50; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (Knife).
SM 0; 5'7"; 180 lbs.

Bite or Punch (12): 1d-3 crushing. Reach C.
Hatchet (7): 1d cutting. Reach 1.
Kick (10): 1d-2 crushing. Reach C, 1.
Large Knife (13): 1d-2 cutting, reach C, 1 *or* 1d-2 impaling, reach C.

Traits: Acute Taste and Smell 3; Bloodlust (12); Callous; Charisma 1; Fat; Gluttony; Secret (Cannibal; Possible Death).
Skills: Acting-13; Administration-12; Carousing-12; Cooking-15; Knife-12; Poisons/TL8-14; Streetwise-12.
Equipment: Hatchet ($40, 2 lbs.), large knife ($40, 1 lb.), sleeping pills and other drugs ($300, neg.), ordinary clothes ($120, 2 lbs.).

THE EMPOWERED CULTIST

There is one stronger than us who possesses us.
– Carl Jung

Not all cultists are just followers and goons. Some have valuable abilities.

Masika Loukombo

170 points

Masika is a priestess in a cult worshipping spirits, in particular the spirits of the dead. Her Master is the high priest (who might be a rogue human witch or something worse in human guise). Masika is no spell caster, though she has a basic feeling for magic; she is a conduit for the spirits, who may talk through her – and even easily possess her. She's rightly feared for this.

Motivation: Serving the cult is what Masika believes in.

Tactics: Nobody expects this woman to be a skilled brawler. Additionally, when a spirit enters her, there is no telling what supernatural capabilities will flow through her.

Weaknesses: She totes a gun, but she's not really fit for a gunfight, especially when she's not "hosting" anything.

ST 11; **DX** 13; **IQ** 12; **HT** 11.
Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11; Will 13; Per 12; FP 12.
Basic Speed 6.00; Basic Move 6; Dodge 9; Parry 11.
SM 0; 5'7"; 140 lbs.

Auto Pistol, .40: 2d large piercing (see p. B278).
Bite or Punch (16): 1d-1 crushing. Reach C.
Kick (14): 1d crushing. Reach C, 1.

Traits: Addiction (Tobacco); Bad Temper (12); Channeling; Fanaticism (Cult); Magery 0; Medium; Nosy; Penetrating Voice; Social Regard 1 (Feared).

Skills: Brawling-16; Fortune Telling (Dream Interpretation)-14; Guns/TL8 (Pistol)-14; Hidden Lore (Spirit Lore)-14; Intimidation-15; Meditation-13; Religious Ritual (Cult)-12.
Equipment: Auto pistol, .40 ($640, 2.1 lbs.), boots (DR 2*, feet, $80, 3 lbs.), ordinary clothes and ritual garb ($200, 2 lbs.).

THE CHARACTER ASSASSIN

[Pietro Aretino] kept all that was famous in Italy in a kind of state of siege.

– *Jacob Burckhardt,*
The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy

The pen is mightier than the sword, and some pens are for hire.

James "Jackal" Jackson

95 points

Jackson is a freelance journalist, but he's better known as a no-holds-barred celebrity blogger. Some would call him a muckraker, others a mudslinger.

What his avid readers don't know is that he's a mercenary. In particular, he regularly takes assignments from his Master, a demonspawn who has set up a "religious group" of his own and who firmly believes in proactivity and in the power of the media. The "Jackal" vets potential donors and new wealthy acolytes for the group, keeps tabs on possible adversaries, and destroys the reputation of actual ones.

While the demonspawn routinely brainwashes his ordinary disciples, he loves having outsiders who do his bidding just because of their own vices; so Jackson is bought, not forced.

Motivation: Money!

Tactics: There's no fight in the "Jackal"; the stun gun is for self-defense. In any case he'll always try to negotiate.

Weaknesses: Again, money. He can be bought by others, too. Also, sometimes he's just too drunk.

ST 10; **DX** 10; **IQ** 14; **HT** 9.
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 13; Per 14; FP 9.
Basic Speed 4.75; Basic Move 4; Dodge 7; Parry 8.
SM 0; 5'6"; 140 lbs.;

Bite or Punch (10): 1d-3 crushing. Reach C.
Kick (8): 1d-2 crushing. Reach C, 1.
Stun Gun (10): HT-3 (0.5) Affliction (see p. B271). Reach C, 1.

Traits: Alcoholism; Contact (Police; Effective skill 15; 12 or less; Somewhat Reliable); Greed (12); Intuition; Reputation +4 (Writer of a juicy blog; 10 or less; To people into social media); Secret (For hire; Utter Rejection); Wealth (Comfortable).
Skills: Computer Hacking/TL8-12; Computer Operation/TL8-15; Computer Programming/TL8-13; Current Affairs/TL8 (People)-14; Observation-13; Photography/TL8-16; Politics-13; Professional Skill (Journalist)-16; Research/TL8-15; Shadowing-14; Streetwise-13; Writing-15.
Equipment: Stun gun ($100, 1 lb.), audio bug (×2, $400, neg.), camcorder ($1,000, 1 lb.), cell phone ($250, 0.25 lbs.), laptop computer ($1,500, 3 lbs.), digital mini-recorder ($30, 0.5 lbs.), nightvision goggles ($600, 2 lbs.), ordinary clothes (Status +1, $240, 2 lbs.), $500 cash.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michele Armellini lives in Udine, Italy, with his very understanding wife Silvia. Michele makes a living out of foreign languages, but he loves dabbling with and studying the obscure and the uncanny – and trying to convert them into game mechanics! He has written for *Pyramid*, and he is the author of ***GURPS WWII: Grim Legions***. He is the author or co-author (with Hans-Christian Vortisch) of several ***GURPS*** products: ***GURPS Locations: St. George's Cathedral, GURPS WWII: Their Finest Hour***, ***GURPS WWII: Doomed White Eagle***, and ***GURPS WWII: Michael's Army***.

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EIDETIC MEMORY

SPACESHIP MALFUNCTIONS

BY DAVID L. PULVER

If a crew neglects maintenance on their spaceship, buys a secondhand or salvaged vessel, or suffers battle damage, their ship may start to malfunction. These rules replace the abstract penalties to HT in the ***Basic Set*** and ***GURPS Spaceships*** with more detailed system failures. Such malfunctions may range from potentially catastrophic (the antimatter containment is failing!) to annoying (the toilet is backing up in the captain's cabin!). This gives PCs who specialize in technical skills more things to do, and everyone the option to ignore minor complications like that broken toilet (living with the annoyance) if they lack the time, money, or skill to fix it. Over time, that tends to give their ship . . . character. Or at least, a unique odor.

Specific malfunctions may also be used instead of the standard, blanket HT penalties when PCs buy used ships at a discount. Would-be buyers can get a sweet deal on a "hunk of junk," then use their skills to gradually bring her back up to spec. The GM might wish to present the party with a secondhand ship with a list of three or four things wrong with it . . . and another two or three they don't know about.

Finally, malfunctions can facilitate an adventure. For instance, the party's starship may receive a distress call from a private vessel who need assistance fixing a vital component; perhaps their engineer is dead or sick. Helping them out could naturally segue into another adventure, depending on who they rescued and what they were doing.

CAUSES OF MALFUNCTION

GURPS Spaceships simplifies maintenance. Each spaceship system beyond a certain size requires a number of workspaces manned by techs to keep it running. Cheap and very cheap ships, available in ***GURPS Spaceships 2: Traders and Liners,*** have additional maintenance costs (1% of value per month if cheap or 1% per week if very cheap) if the spacecraft is in use during the maintenance period (that month or week).

The rules for maintenance in ***GURPS Basic Set*** **(**p. B485) are more detailed, but still abstract. Items require a periodic maintenance check against a skill such as Mechanic, taking specified man-hours. If that time isn't taken, or the check fails, the vehicle loses a point of HT until repaired and some form of "additional incapacity" occurs. In this case, the additional incapacity is a malfunction, as determined below. Unfortunately, for complex systems like ***Spaceships,*** using this rule would require making individual checks against the many different subsystems aboard the ship, each with different skills.

To make maintenance a more complex affair, but one that doesn't drive you mad with record keeping, consider using the following optional rule.

Each week, the GM or ship owner rolls against the spacecraft's HT-3. A failure indicates a potential malfunction; a critical failure means 1d+1 possible malfunctions. (Exception: if a vessel is powered down in a hangar or otherwise mothballed, there's no need to roll.)

For each potential malfunction, roll on the *Random Malfunction Table* (pp. 20-21) to see *where* the malfunction might develop; this usually requires a second roll on the individual spaceship's system list (in each spaceship's description) or on the *Core System or Non-System Component* table (p. 21) to further localize it. Then refer to *System Malfunctions* (pp. 21-27) for guidelines on what the specific symptom is. It's possible that the malfunction may lie dormant if the system in question is not being used – a weapon malfunction might not be noticed until the weapons are fired. Feel free to come up with creative minor problems ("the ship's cat had kittens inside the aft power converter . . .").

Next, determine the repair skill required to fix it. The repair skills for systems are listed in ***GURPS Spaceships*** under each system's description; use that unless the malfunction effects indicate a different skill is required (e.g., for a software glitch). Based on this, the GM can decide, or randomly determine, which technician aboard the ship was responsible for the system. The GM should then inform the person that it looks like something is wrong with the system or subsystem in question. The crewer then gets an immediate Repair skill roll.

If that roll succeeds, it means that technician's careful preventive maintenance and/or diligent attention diagnosed and fixed the emergent fault right away, or at least within a half hour or so. ("The turret motor was jamming in weapons battery #2, but you swapped in some parts and repaired it.")

If he fails, the fault is a *serious* malfunction, one that both requires specialized spare parts and a several man-hours of time to fix. See *Fixing Serious Malfunctions,* below. On a critical failure, it is not repairable and must be replaced.

In the event of a failure (unless it's a critical failure), it is up to the technician whether to try to repair it, risking possible further damage, or to leave the malfunction as is until the crew can get to a starport where the ship can receive full time attention.

Example

The party's ship is a *Star Flower*-class trader (***GURPS Spaceships,*** p. 6). It has HT 13, so each week the GM makes a HT-3 roll. After two weeks, the roll fails and a possible malfunction develops. The GM rolls on the *Random Malfunction Table* and gets 9, rear hull. The GM then rolls on the *Star Flower*'s systems table under "Rear Hull" and gets 2, which is the standard reactionless drive engine. The GM then consults *Reactionless or Electric Engine Malfunction* and rolls 1d, getting 3: thruster malfunction. The engine begins generating only half the usual acceleration (dropping from 1G to 0.5G). Since the ship is, in fact, using its drive, a red light flashes on the ship's engineering display. Looking up reactionless engines in ***GURPS Spaceships,*** p. 24, the GM finds the relevant repair skill is Mechanic (Reactionless Drive). The GM knows there are two techs aboard the ship who share maintenance duties. A random roll assigns it to junior engineer Vic Davis, who has Mechanic (Reactionless Drive)-12. He now rolls to see if he can immediately fix the problem. Unfortunately, he rolls a 14 and fails to repair it. The fault has become a serious malfunction. The drive will remain at reduced thrust until Davis or another technician successfully solves the problem, or until the ship undergoes full repairs.

If spare parts are unavailable, the mechanic has several options. First, the mechanic may attempt to improvise a temporary solution – a jury-rig. If so, roll to fix the system as above, but at -2. Moreover, a success only means it keeps working until it is used during a stressful situation. At that time, roll against the spaceship's HT to see if the jury-rig holds or fails (resulting in the system becoming disabled again).

Second, the mechanic may hold off repairs until spare parts can be acquired from a starport of the ship's TL or higher. Parts will be available in any starport of class IV or V, but a class III only has parts 50% of the time, and a class II has only a 1-in-6 chance.

Third, the technician can fabricate the parts. This requires a Machinist skill roll and the use of a factory system or a minifac. Time required depends on the cost of the parts; use the normal rules for factories to determine how long fabrication will take. A failed Machinist roll means the spare part is flawed and useless (on a critical failure, it may seem usable, but breaks down later on at the worst possible moment).

Fourth, the crew can salvage the parts. If there is another ship of identical size with the same system, it can be stripped for replacement parts. The GM may also allow successful use of Scrounging skill rolls from a suitable location (wrecked ship, a spaceport repair yard, etc.).

Spare Parts: These usually cost 1d% of the system's cost. When only a single cabin or specialized room equivalent suffers a malfunction, the cost of spares is less than required for the entire system. Use a "system cost" of $150,000 per cabin-equivalent plus the cost of special equipment (automeds, labs, teleport projectors, minifacs). When a single weapon in a battery suffers a malfunction, divide the cost by the base number of weapons that type of battery has (e.g., 10 if secondary). Use a cost of $1 per ton of ship (maximum $10,000) for non-system malfunctions.

Replacement: If a critical failure or lack of spare parts necessitates total replacement, this requires a Class IV or better starport, or manufacturing it in a full-scale factory system (a minifac is insufficient). Cost of purchasing a replacement is 10× the cost of spares. Installation requires the same time as a repair; a critical failure breaks the replacement!

Malfunctions and Ship Pricing

If a secondhand starship has known unrepaired severe malfunctions (that is, those that require spare parts), reduce the purchase cost by at least *twice* the cost of purchasing spare parts needed to fix them. The GM may also wish to have any cheap or very cheap starships (see ***GURPS Spaceships: Traders and Liners***) come with multiple *unknown* serious malfunctions. A suggested number is 1d for a cheap starship and 2d for a very cheap starship.

FIXING SERIOUS MALFUNCTIONS

Serious malfunctions require use of spare parts (unless they're computer glitches). If a ship has an engine room or is SM +10 or larger, it has a stock of spare parts. Roll 1d. On a roll of 4 or more, the right part is in stock. Otherwise, or if the ship doesn't meet the above requirement, it is not available.

If the correct spare parts are available, it takes eight hours and a successful Repair skill roll to fit. A critical success does it in half the time, and a success fits it properly. A failure means another attempt is required, but at a cumulative -1. A critical failure means the system cannot be repaired at all; it must be entirely replaced.

RANDOM MALFUNCTION TABLE

The GM can simply choose a malfunction appropriate to the adventure. Alternatively, generate one randomly.

2d	*Malfunction Location*
2-5	Front hull
6	Central hull
7	Core system or non-system component
8	Central hull
9-12	Rear hull

Front Hull, Central Hull, Rear Hull: Roll 1d for location in that hull section to determine which system suffers a malfunction (excluding core systems).

Core System or Non-System Component: Any spacecraft has two core systems; it also has other "non-system" components that might malfunction that are not explicitly assigned to systems. If this result is rolled, roll 1d on the table below to determine whether one of the core systems has failed, or whether a different component has malfunctioned:

1d	*Malfunction Location*
1-2	1st core system
3-4	2nd core system
5-6	Non-system component

1st Core System: The core system closest to the front of the vessel suffers a malfunction. If the vessel has a core system in the forward hull, that is where the malfunction occurs. Otherwise, it's the central hull system.

2nd Core System: The core system closest to the rear of the vessel suffers a malfunction. If the vessel has a core system in the rear hull, that is what malfunctions. Otherwise, it is the central hull system that malfunctions.

Non-System Component: See below.

Non-System Component

A component not associated with a specific system malfunctions. Roll 1d below (or the GM may pick the result). Add 1 on the roll if the vessel is SM +9 or larger. Reroll if inappropriate to the vehicle design. The relevant repair skill is Mechanic (Vehicle Type).

1-2. Airlock. One of a spacecraft's (SM-4) airlocks malfunctions. The airlock is unable to equalize pressure until repaired.

3. Landing Gear Jammed. If the spacecraft has landing gear (if streamlined or capable of 0.1G or better acceleration), the gear jams. It either fails to lower, or if already down, cannot be retracted. Attempting to land without retracting the gear imposes an extra -4, and always requires a Piloting roll. Attempting to fly in atmosphere with extended landing gear reduces top air speed by 20%, with a maximum of 600 mph.

4. Intercom Failure. The ship's internal messaging system is malfunctioning. In addition to being an annoyance, the Motivate Crewman (***Spaceships,*** p. 51) and Supervise Damage Control (***Spaceships,*** p. 54) tasks now require helmet radios, dedicated messengers, or the like – unless the crew or party are in the same system as the supervisor. Leadership Tasks (***Spaceships,*** p. 51) only affect those in the same system as the leader.

5. Portal Malfunction. One or more internal doors or hatches providing access to the system (or a room within the system) either jams shut or won't close. This will not be apparent until someone uses the portal, or, if it refuses to shut and seal, a "red light" goes off during an attempt to seal the ship's compartments automatically.

6. Safety System Malfunction. Safety systems such as fire suppression or emergency seals in a random system that contains occupants (that is, not armor) cease to function properly. Until repaired, add 2 to all rolls on the *Casualty Table* (***GURPS Spaceships,*** p. 63) when checking for crew injuries to occupants if that system is disabled or destroyed.

7. Rapid Transit Failure. An elevator or turbo-lift malfunctions. Perhaps it sticks between floors (trapping the occupants until they can force their way out or repair it). Or perhaps the call system fails and the car cannot be summoned to that particular floor.

SYSTEM MALFUNCTIONS

Examples of malfunctions for the more common systems in the core ***GURPS Spaceships*** book are given here. For systems from other supplements, extrapolate similar results, or simply assume that a malfunction means the system does not function until repaired (this is especially appropriate for single-function systems like solar panels or ram scoops).

If a system (core or hull) suffers a malfunction, refer to the individual descriptions below for details. Some complex systems have multiple possibilities; which one occurs requires a die roll or GM fiat. In other instances, the result is simply the disabling of the system until repaired.

Software Bug

One suggested malfunction is the "software bug." This means the problem is a result of a computer software error. Reroll (unless there is only one other possible result) and apply that malfunction; roll again if "software bug" reoccurs. However, fixing the problem requires a Computer Programming roll instead of the usual repair skill; a serious problem does not require spare parts.

Armor Malfunction

An armor malfunction generally means that routine operational stress, prior combat damage, or even environmental effects (such as a meteroid impact) has caused some degree of structural malformation or a weak point to develop, or possibly has resulted in a chunk of armor plate physically coming loose or drifting away.

This results in a loss of 10% of dDR (minimum dDR 1) of that armor system, reducing the dDR on the side of the vehicle (front, rear, sides) that it protects.

In addition, roll 1d. On 5-6, an armor malfunction may also be accompanied by a slow pressure leak in the vessel. If so, there is a 1-in-6 chance per day it is not repaired that the a "blowout" occurs, resulting in explosive decompression for the occupants of a random system in that hull section. Emergency pressure doors will seal the compartment off automatically, but anyone in it will be suddenly exposed to vacuum (see p. B437); Crewman (Spacer) roll is needed to patch the hole, or Vacc Suit to gear up in time. Repair of armor malfunctions normally requires actually exiting the vessel and working in space.

Cargo Hold Malfunction

Malfunctions to a cargo hold system are rarely that serious, but a few things can go wrong. Roll 1d. Add 2 to the roll if the cargo has the refrigeration feature.

1-3. Cargo Door Failure. The main door or ramp for this cargo hold has jammed or broken. It may be stuck in either an open or closed position at the GM's option, preventing entry or egress until the door is repaired.

4-6. Cargo Loader Failure. Cargo holds are assumed to contain a crane, winches, or similar loading equipment. The systems for this cargo hold suffers mechanical failure. As a result, any loading times are increased tenfold.

7-8. Refrigeration Failure. Temperature fluctuations are followed by a failure of the refrigeration system. Perishables such as meat that require cold storage spoil after several hours. In space, if the cargo can survive vacuum and very low temperatures, a stopgap alternative may be to depressurize the cargo hold or to sling the cargo outside the ship. Note that space is not automatically cold – items in direct sunlight will heat up.

Cloaking Device Malfunction

Cloaking devices often seem to fail at the worst possible times . . .

1. System Failure. The cloaking device stops working until repaired, or fails to turn on when activated.

2. Power Drain. The cloaking device requires twice as many Power Points to operate as usual.

3. Field Synchronization Failure. The cloaking device works, but the subsystem that synchronizes the field with the vehicle's sensor suite has failed. As a result, the field is as opaque to the cloaked vessel as to those outside it, effectively blinding its users.

4-5. Energy Leak. The cloaking device fails in a subtle fashion, e.g., blocking visible light and infrared, but leaking some other less obvious radiation (e.g., neutrinos). As a result, a spacecraft using scientific or multipurpose comm/sensor array can detect the vessel at only -2. Another type of sensor array might be modified (perhaps requiring Physics and Engineering skill rolls) to track the energy leakage.

6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

Contragravity Lifter Malfunction

The worse possible failure would be losing contragravity lifter in the midst of a takeoff or landing, if the vessel has no other means of support.

1-2. System Failure. The contragravity lifter stops working until repaired, or fails to turn on when activated.

3. Power Drain. The unit requires twice as many Power Points to operate as usual.

4-5. Partial Failure. Instead of canceling the usual 10G, the system only cancels 1d×1.5 gravities.

6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

Control Room Malfunction

The control room also includes a comm/sensor system, computers, and the ship's gyros or attitude thrusters (reaction control system). Since most spacecraft only have a single control room system, malfunctions here can be of critical importance.

1. Reaction Control System Malfunction. The vessel's ability to change direction is impaired. Apply -4 to Piloting skill rolls unless the vessel has a second (auxiliary) control room that can take over.

2. Sensor System Failure. One of the three classes of sensor systems in the control room's comm/sensor array is not displaying data: the passive sensors, active sensors, or signal detection sensors. Roll randomly to see which of the three classes has failed.

3. Communications Suite Failure. Either the spacecraft's radio (roll 1-3) or the laser communicator (roll 4-6) has failed.

4. Control Station Malfunction. One of the control room's control stations develops a fault and may not be used. Alternatively, the control room's main display screen fails or displays garbage. In particular, this imposes -2 on the Space Tactics task (***Spaceships,*** p. 51).

5. Network Problems. The computers keep freezing up or glitching. This imposes -2 on Communications, Engineering, Gunnery, Navigation, Piloting, and Sensor tasks (***Spaceships,*** pp. 51-54), or when using the network for other things (e.g., doing your taxes).

6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

Defensive ECM Malfunction

Roll 1d to determine the malfunction.

1-2. System Failure. The system stops working, or fails to turn on when activated.

3-4. System Degradation. Some of the emitters malfunction. The system provides only half the usual defensive modifier (-1 to attack rolls) and grants no bonus to Dodge rolls.

5. Signal Leak. Until repaired, the system gives off a signal that makes it easier for the enemy to track you! Instead of -2 to attack, the enemy gets +1 to hit; there is no modifier to Dodge. The leakage may not be obvious from within the vessel, but if a friend targets the vessel, that crew may notice and comment on the signal leakage . . .

6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

> *This end [of the ship] should point toward the ground if you want to go to space.*
>
> *If it starts pointing toward space you are having a bad problem, and you will not go to space today.*
>
> *– Randall Monroe,* ***Thing Explainer***

Engine Room Malfunction

If an engine room malfunction occurs, roll 1d.

1-3. Machine Tool Malfunction. A key machine tool system (lathe, grinding machine, drill press, X-ray diagnostic scanner, etc.) in the engine room breaks down. Impose -2 on rolls to repair other equipment in the ship until the tool is fixed.

4-5. Control Station Failure. The control station in the engine room itself ceases to function.

6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

Enhanced, Multipurpose, Scientific, or Tactical Comm/Sensor Array Malfunction

If these subsystems fail, the less powerful comm/sensor array in the control room can be used instead, unless it has also malfunctioned. Roll 1d.

1. Radio Failure. The spacecraft's radio communicator has failed.

2. Laser Comm Failure. The spacecraft's laser communicator has failed.

3. Active Sensor System Failure. The active sensors in the control room's comm/sensor array (providing radar or ladar) fail to work.

4. Passive Sensor System Failure. The passive sensors in the control room's comm/sensor array (providing hyperspectral and telescopic vision) do not work.

5. Signal Detection Failure. Roll 1d: the radar (1-2), radio (3-4), or laser (5-6) detection sensors cease to function.

6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

External Clamp Malfunction

The automatic systems have failed. Securing the clamps requires exiting the vessel and manually attaching the needed grapples. Clamping now requires (vessel tonnage)/400 man-hours, minimum 15 minutes, and necessitates a successful roll against the lower of Crewman (Spacer) and Freefall skill of whoever is leading the team.

Factory Malfunction

A factory malfunction may not be apparent until the production is underway, or it might interrupt an ongoing fabrication run. Roll 1d.

1-2. Quality Control Failure. The goods produced have subtle flaws that make them of a least one quality level worse than intended (e.g., cheap quality).

3. Total Failure. A major malfunction shuts down the production line.

4-5. Partial Line Failure. One of the production lines in the factory system has failed. Double the time required to produce anything.

6. Software Bug. See p. 21. In cinematic games, this might also cause a robofac, nanofabricator, or replicator to produce something dangerous or annoying and fail to shut off . . . whether the replicator is turning the ship's part supply or feedstock into chocolate ice cream or killer nanobots is up to the GM!

Force Screen Malfunction

These malfunctions often will only become apparent when the screen is under stress (e.g. under attack). Roll 1d.

1. Total Failure. The screen simply refuses to work.

2. Power Leak. The screen requires twice as many Power Points to operate.

3. Grid Coverage Failure. The screen has developed a "hole" in its coverage; e.g., it will not protect the front hull, rear hull, or side (roll randomly).

4. Weakened. The screen only provides half its usual DR.

5. Rapid Overload. The screen's energy dissipation functions rapidly overloads. Simulate this by treating the screen's dDR as fully ablative rather than semi-ablative.

6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

Numerous various force screen options also exist. If more exotic functions (e.g., nuclear damper) were included, the GM may wish to modify some results to take these peculiarities into account, e.g., reducing the damper coverage radius instead of DR.

MAJOR DAMAGE FROM MALFUNCTIONS

Use this table to determine the injury inflicted to the spacecraft when a malfunction results in major damage.

SM	*Injury (dHP)*
SM+4	1d-2
SM+5	1d-1
SM+6	1d
SM+7	1d+2
SM+8	2d
SM+9	3d
SM+10	4d+1
SM+11	6d-1
SM+12	9d
SM+13	7d×2
SM+14	2d×10
SM+15	3d×10

Fuel Tank Malfunction

For fuel tank malfunctions, roll 1d.

1-3. Slow Leak. The tank's insulation system is damaged. Every day until repaired, it loses 10% of its original stored reaction mass or fuel (reduce delta-V by that amount). A slow leak may not be easily detected (especially if some other sensors are also malfunctioning). Roll against the chief engineer's Mechanic skill every day to isolate the problem.

4-6. Fast Leak. As above, but the leak is every half hour until repaired. However, fast leaks are usually easy to detect; the problem is to fix them before the tank is emptied.

If a tank containing antimatter fuel is leaking, fixing the leak may be hazardous, exposing the repair crew to 1d × 100 rads of gamma radiation every half hour they are working; a critical failure may also result in an explosion (see *Major Damage From Malfunctions,* p. 23).

Habitat Malfunction

Habitat systems consist of multiple individual cabins or rooms. Because each habitat system may have various options, no table can cover every possibility. Instead, the GM should simply pick one of the rooms or cabins and then roll 2d to see what might go wrong. Reroll anything inappropriate. If a habitat consists *only* of steerage cargo, instead consider rolling on the *Cargo Hold Malfunction* table (pp. 21-22).

2. Furniture Malfunction. This may be a swivel chair or desk lamp ceasing to work, or a closet door jamming, or lights failing in a particular cabin, or failure of a minor appliance, such as a coffee maker. Likely to produce loud complaints from passengers!

3. Laundry Malfunction. A failure in the habitat's washer or dryer systems (or some other high-tech clothing fabricator) may prevent proper cleaning of clothing, stain or shrink an entire set of uniforms, etc.

4. Plumbing Malfunction. This can range from backed up or overflowing toilets in one or more cabins to a shower with a messed up control dial (resulting in freezing or scalding water). Plumbing malfunctions could also impair laundry or food preparation operations.

5. Software Bug. See p. 21.

6. Wastewater Recycling Malfunction. This system reprocesses liquid and solid wastes for water. Failure results in a reduction of supply to stored water (this is 24 man-hours per rated occupant of the habitat) until fixed.

7. Specialized Room Malfunction. If the habitat contains specialized rooms other than simple cabins or cargo, something about them fails. If the ship has artificial gravity or spin gravity, a specialized room malfunction may instead have a 1-in-6 chance of resulting in an the gravity system ceasing to function. See *Specialized Room Problems* (below) for some ideas.

8. Lighting or Intercom Malfunction. Requires answering the question: How many spacers does it take to change a light bulb? One or more habitats or rooms is plunged into darkness or has communications cut off from the rest of the ship.

9. Galley Malfunction. Habitats with cabins (or cells) include kitchens with associated appliances (ovens, coffee makers, fridges, etc.). A malfunction in the galley appliances (often from human error) results in the total or partial interruption of food preparation until it can be fixed. At the GM discretion, a galley malfunction could cause food poisoning (e.g., due to spoiled, contaminated or undercooked food).

10. Climate Control Malfunction. Temperature will either rise or fall (GM's discretion) by 3°F per minute until malfunction is repaired. It may be a problem with the entire habitat (roll of 1-3 on 1d) or a single cabin or room (roll of 4-6).

11-12. Air Purification Failure. This is a life support failure in the habitat system as a whole, rather than in an individual cabin. Failure in a major subsystem (such as carbon monoxide scrubbing) gradually turns the air toxic, triggering automatic release of short-term emergency oxygen systems and/or warnings to suit up. The end result is that emergency bottled-oxygen masks must be used. Air supply duration reduced to one man-hour per seat.

Hangar Bay Malfunction

Roll 1d for the type of malfunction.

1-2. Hangar Bay Doors. The hangar doors are jammed shut. Until repaired, entry or exit is impossible (at least without blasting one's way out).

3-4. Refueling Lines. Smaller craft may not be refueled from inside the hangar bay.

5. Air Pump Malfunction. The hangar bay cannot be pressurized if opened in vacuum.

6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

SPECIALIZED ROOM PROBLEMS

The options are too many to randomly determine, but they could include:

- Cell or cage's surveillance camera ceases to work or one or more cell locks open.
- Briefing room's A/V system fails (perhaps in the middle of a presentation).
- Establishment's automated credit or cash machine may be down, increasing the workload when serving customers.
- Hibernation chambers that malfunction will typically have some form of safety systems that sound an alarm. A successful Physician roll may be needed to safely remove the occupants of a failing hibernation chamber, with failure or inattention resulting in significant tissue damage (6d injury) from an unsupervised revival.
- Office terminal (or other piece of office equipment) ceases to work.
- Lab ceases to function, or, more, dangerously, a containment system holding a dangerous item that is being studied fails, risking contamination of the ship.
- Minifacs may suffer malfunctions identical to those of factories.
- Sickbay malfunctions are most likely to be in diagnostic systems such as medical scanners, eliminating the ability to use them for Diagnosis skill rolls, or in automed systems. Redundant safety systems in automeds generally mean they will simply stop working, but at the GM's option could inflict harm or inject the wrong drugs.
- Teleport projector malfunctions could either produce all manner of hideous effects of the sort found in old B-movies and sci-fi dramas, or simply stop working. A simple alternative is that the malfunction means they can send but not retrieve, or vice versa.

Jump Gate Malfunction

Roll 1d to determine what goes wrong.

1-2. Power Efficiency Problem. The gate requires an extra Power Point to activate.

3-4. Total Failure. The gate will not operate at all.

5. Gate Instability. The gate might fail when a ship is halfway through (slicing the vessel in half!), create a feedback loop that damages whatever gate is on the other end (assuming there is one), or produce a strange effect (e.g., opening a portal to another dimension or far distant location instead of the expected destination).

6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

Mining and Refinery Malfunction

Roll 1d to determine what goes wrong.

1-2. Quality Control Failure. The ore or fuel is contaminated with impurities.

3. Total Failure. A major malfunction shuts down the entire system.

4-5. Partial Failure. Production is slowed. Double the time required to mine or refine anything.

6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

Open Space Malfunction

An open space cannot malfunction; re-roll.

Passenger Seating Malfunction

Roll 1d to see what the problem is.

1-3. Oxygen System Malfunction. Primary oxygen plant fails, and emergency bottled-oxygen masks must be used. Air supply duration reduced to one man-hour per seat.

4-5. Climate Control Malfunction. Temperature will either rise or fall (GM's discretion) by 3°F per minute until malfunction is repaired.

6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

Power Plant, Chemical Energy, Malfunction

Use this for fuel cells and MHD turbines. Roll 1d.

1-3. System Failure. No power until repaired.

4-5. Partial Failure. System uses 1.5 as much fuel until repaired.

6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

Power Plant, Reactor (Any), Malfunction

Fission, fusion, antimatter, super fusion, and total conversion reactors are normally designed, for safety reasons, to shut down completely in the event of a malfunction. Roll 1d. If the system is an antimatter reactor, add 1.

1-4. Reactor Shutdown. The reactor needs to shut down due to a problem with the reactor itself or support machinery, such as the cooling system.

5. Radiation Leak. As above. However, high radiation has contaminated the system, complicating repairs. The reactor system itself is "hot" (1d×100 rads per hour), which will affect any persons (or robots) performing repairs or otherwise spending time there.

6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

7. Catastrophic Failure. An antimatter (or exotic fuel) containment system is on the verge of failure, resulting in a matter/antimatter explosion that may destroy the spacecraft if not checked within a few minutes. A Halt Catastrophe roll (see ***GURPS Spaceships,*** p. 64) is needed.

Reaction Engine Malfunction

Use this for any jet engine or reaction engine *except* an electric engine (ion drive or mass driver). Roll 1d. If the system is an antimatter engine, add 1. If the system is a chemical rocket or jet engine, subtract 1.

0-2. Reduced Thrust. The engine structure is overstressed or the coolant system is failing. It can only safely produce half its normal thrust (e.g., 0.3G would become 0.15G).

3. Total Shutdown. The fuel turbopump or drive reactor shuts down, or the pulse drive ignition system ceases to function. The engine is inoperable until repaired.

4. Warning Signs. The engine begins vibrating, overheating, or giving off radiation. Until repaired, after each hour (or fraction) in use roll 1d: On a roll of 6, it suffers a catastrophic failure, melting, imploding, or exploding. The system is disabled, and the ship itself takes major damage (see *Major Damage From Malfunctions,* p. 23).

5. Software Bug. See p. 21.

6. Radiation Leak. Roll again using 1d-1. However, high radiation (1d × 100 rads per hour) will affect anyone or thing attempting repairs.

7. Catastrophic Failure. An antimatter (or exotic fuel) containment system is on the verge of failure, resulting in a matter/antimatter explosion that may destroy the spacecraft if not checked within a few minutes. A Halt Catastrophe roll (see ***GURPS Spaceships,*** p. 64) is needed.

Reactionless or Electric Engine Malfunction

To determine the symptoms of a reactionless engine or electric engine (ion drive, mass driver) malfunction, roll 1d on the table below. Add 1 if a reactionless engine.

1-2. Power Inefficiency. The engine requires an extra Power Point (e.g., two instead of one) to operate.

3. Thruster Malfunction. The system generates only half the usual thrust when used (but still requires normal Power Point consumption).

4-5. System Failure. The system simply stops working, or fails to start, until repaired.

6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

7. Warning Signs. As per *Reaction Engine Malfunction,* above, except that the symptom may also be giving off exotic radiation associated with the drive (e.g., gravity waves).

Reconfigurable System Malfunction

These systems are most likely to suffer mechanical failures. Roll 1d.

1-3. Jammed. The system is stuck in its last form and cannot reconfigure.

4-5. Wear and Tear. The system takes three times as long (typically 60 seconds) to transform.

6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

Robot Arm Malfunction

Roll 1d to determine what goes wrong.

1. Structural Weakness. If the arm is used to strike, grab, or lift, roll against the vessel's HT each turn of combat action, or every minute of routine loading or other activities. On a failure, the arm breaks (until it has a major repair). If the problem is diagnosed but not fixed, the arm can be used at half ST without danger.

2. Broken Manipulator. The hand or gripper is damaged. Until repaired, the arm can function as a striker, but not as a manipulator.

3. Control Issue. Apply the Klutz disadvantage while using the arm.

4. Out of Control. There is a malfunction in the cybernetics. When activated, the arm begins to jerk and thrash wildly about, possibly striking at the ship or anything nearby.

5-6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

Soft Landing System Malfunction

Malfunctions in a landing system can be catastrophic. Roll 1d for the type of malfunction.

1-4. Deployment Malfunction. The airbags, parachutes, glider wings, or whatever are stuck and fail to deploy automatically before landing. Make a Piloting roll to perform a manual deployment to avoid a crash.

5-6. Software Glitch. The problem is a software issue (though not a full-blown bug), requiring a Computer Operation roll to fix.

Space Sails Malfunction

Roll 1d to determine the problem.

1-2. Control Failure. Directional changes are not possible until repaired.

3-5. Deployment Failure. Mechanism for deploying or folding the sail malfunctions. Fixing it requires a space walk. If the vessel is streamlined, the space sails will be destroyed if reentry is attempted.

6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

Stardrive Malfunction

The malfunction will usually become apparent when the drive is activated. In the case of drives that operate continuously, such as warp drives, the malfunction may occur while the drive is in use. Roll 1d.

1-2. Total Drive Failure. The drive won't work at all until repaired.

3. Control Problem. The drive feels less responsive than usual. Take -2 on Navigation or Piloting rolls (whichever is used to control the stardrive).

4. Power Efficiency Problem. The drive requires twice as many Power Points to activate as usual.

5. Exotic Malfunction. An unusual malfunction or side effect occurs when the drive is activated. This should be appropriate to the specific type of stardrive, but could include misjumping to the wrong destination (or even the wrong solar system), a temporal anomaly, the drive not turning off, or being trapped in hyperspace unable to reemerge.

6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

Stasis Web Malfunction

Stasis webs that malfunction usually simply fail to work, but sometimes the effects are more dramatic. Roll 1d.

1-2. Electronics Fault. The stasis web simply stops functioning until repaired.

3-4. Damaged Timing System. Whenever the stasis field is activated, roll 1d. On 1-3, the field lasts significantly longer than the set duration. On 4-6, it lasts for a shorter period.

5. Time Warp. The next time the stasis web is activated, a bizarre temporal malfunction occurs, such as the ship traveling forward or backward in time, or a temporal inversion in which time flows rapidly inside the web rather than stopping.

6. Software Bug. See p. 21.

Upper Stage Malfunction

Malfunctions directly affecting the upper stage itself are usually in the mechanism intended to ensure a smooth separation. Roll 1d.

1-4. Separation Issue. An attempt to eject the upper stage will fail.

5-6. Software Bug. As above, but the problem is software issue, requiring a Computer Operation roll to fix.

> *Mike: Tom, what's our situation?*
> *Tom Servo: Beginning re-entry, Mike.*
> *Mike: Good.*
> *Tom Servo: Total heat shield failure, Mike.*
> *Mike: Bad! What's going on?*
> *Tom Servo: Deck three:* ***broken away.*** *Deck four:* ***broken away*** *. . . Deck five:* ***broken away.*** *Deck six:* ***broken away.*** *Deck seven: Melting . . . and* ***broken away.***
>
> – ***Mystery Science Theater 3000,*** *#10.13*

Weapons Battery Malfunction

The GM can roll 1d or choose one of these malfunctions. In the case of batteries with multiple weapons, the malfunction usually affects only one part of the weapon system; the GM can determine which or roll randomly.

1. *Turret Jammed.* One of the battery's turrets can no longer rotate, or its beam pointer system is malfunctioning. Until it is repaired, treat the turret as a fixed mount, but without the +2 to hit. If the battery has no turrets, or is a spinal mount, treat this as an autoloader failure (below).

2. *Autoloader Failure.* A gun or launcher system in the battery suffers a failure in its automatic loading system. In order for the weapon to be fired, a crewer working in the system must act as a loader. If the weapon has no guns or launchers, treat as a mechanical or electrical fault (below).

3. *Beam Focusing Failure.* One of the battery's beam weapons is treated as if it had only 1/10 its normal output (e.g., a 100MJ beam is treated as 10 MJ).

4. *Mechanical or Electrical Fault.* One of the weapons in the battery simply does not fire.

5. *Software Bug.* See p. 21.

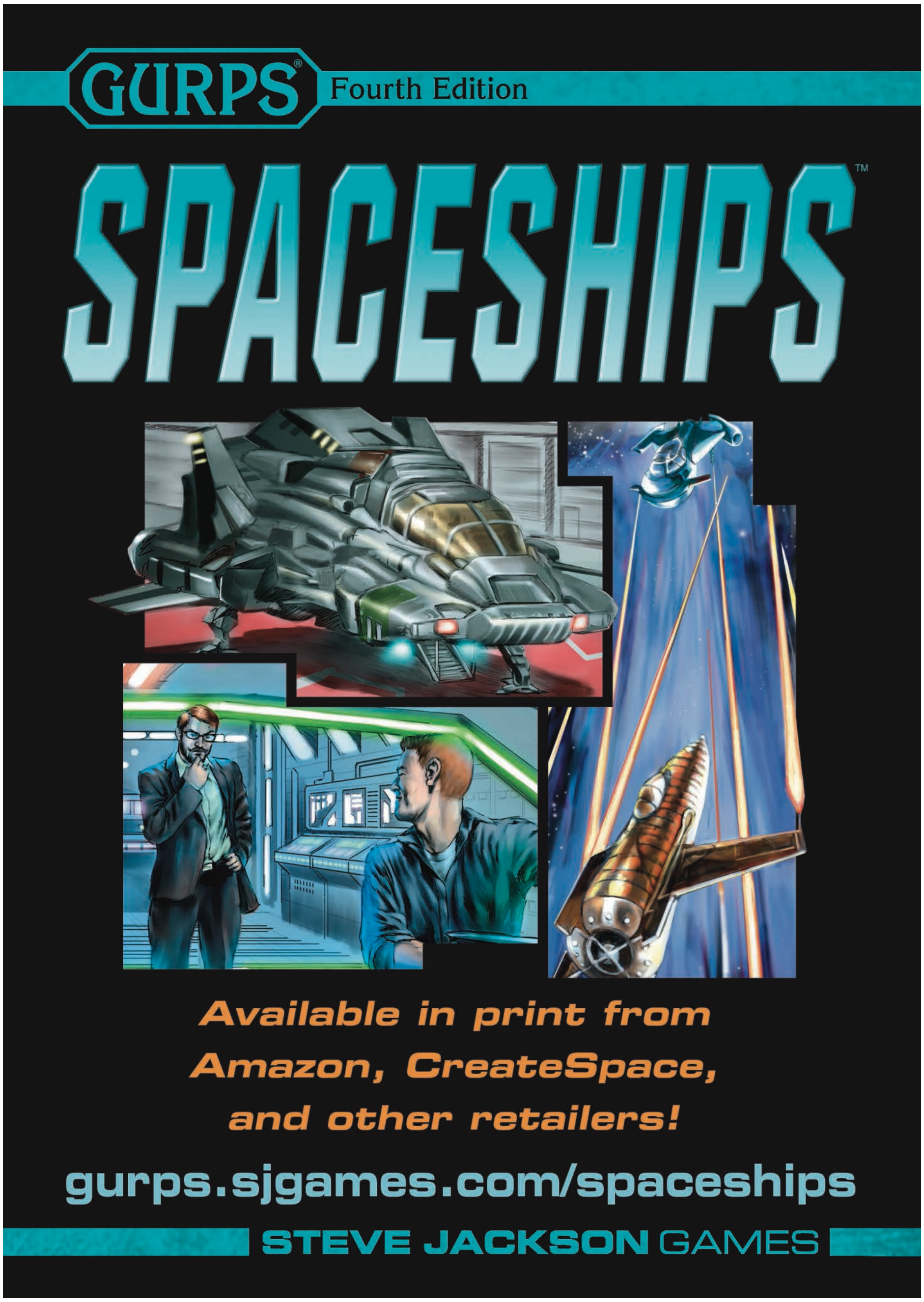
6. *Cooling Failure (Beam Weapon or Gun) or Launch Failure (Missile).*

In a beam weapon or gun, the cooling system for the entire weapons battery is malfunctioning. It can fire at half the usual RoF at no penalty (if this gives a RoF 1/2, it can fire every other turn). Or you can fire it at the normal RoF, but the weapon gains a Malfunction number (p. B407) of 14, -1 per additional turn of full-RoF fire, until a full turn of inactivity lets it cool.

In a missile, there is a problem with the ammunition. Roll another 1d. On 1-3, the result is a guidance/fusing failure with the missile. If it is launched, it will fire but fails to track a target, or alternatively, a proximity fused warhead fails to activate; either way, the missile can launch, but the result is a miss. On 4-6, one of the missiles experiences a propulsion failure. When next launched, it misfires, blocking the tube. A dud missile can be blown out into space, or it can be removed from the launcher for later repair (as per minor repairs) to get it functional again. Ejecting the missile takes no extra time, but removing the missile takes the same time as launching a new missile; the gunner will need to decide which tack to take.

ABOUT THE COLUMNIST

David L. Pulver is a Canadian freelance author. An avid science-fiction fan, he began roleplaying in junior high with the newly released ***Basic Dungeons & Dragons.*** Upon graduating from university, he decided to become a game designer. Since then, David has written over 70 roleplaying game books, and he has worked as a staff writer, editor, and line developer for Steve Jackson Games and Guardians of Order. He is best known for creating ***Transhuman Space,*** co-authoring the ***Big Eyes, Small Mouth*** anime RPG, and writing countless ***GURPS*** books, including the ***GURPS Basic Set,*** *Fourth Edition,* ***GURPS Ultra-Tech,*** and the ***GURPS Spaceships*** series.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DESIGNER'S NOTES

THE SILK ROAD

BY MATT RIGGSBY

The Silk Road is to some extent an obsolete concept. An East-West silk trade both predated and survived it, and ultimately the Tarim Basin routes were just one conduit out of many through which merchandise traveled. The first chapter of ***GURPS Hot Spots: The Silk Road*** alludes to "Silk Roads," describing the plethora of routes by which merchants moved their goods as well as hinting at the diversity of those goods. To a considerable extent, that's the direction in which modern scholarship has moved. Silk was hardly the only commodity or even the only luxury good carried along these routes, and many of them simply weren't roads. The Silk Road as presented in ***The Silk Road*** is just one chapter in a long and complicated story.

Yet the phrase remains current, even in academia. The concept is a powerful one. The evidence is clear that our ancestors were never as stationary and isolated as our imagination sometimes has them. The book mentions various bits of evidence of long-distance trade and travel (Tang-dynasty silk in the Netherlands, a possibly Roman signature on a Central Asian painting), but more are coming to light all the time. About two weeks after I turned in my final comments and corrections for ***The Silk Road***, I came across a pair of relevant news items. One was the discovery of Roman coins dating to the reign of Constantine, found in a fifth-century context in Japan. The other was the discovery of medieval burials in England of two people with East Asian features. Neither necessarily means direct contact between east and west, but they do serve as another reminder that people and their goods, in their small ways, moved around a lot more than history has recorded. Even in the real world, these ancient trade routes weren't just about transporting around fabulous wealth. They were about people having strange and remarkable experiences, and that's exactly the kind of thing adventurers get to do.

OFF-ROAD

The decline of the Tarim Basin silk routes in favor of a variety of Silk Roads didn't mean the end of significance for Central Asia. The region has had an eventful history, veering between being the home of great empires and collapsing into a chaotic jumble of territories contested by countless nomadic tribes. This history picks up where ***The Silk Road*** leaves off, with the fall of the Tang dynasty, and follows it to the present day.

THE OLD DAYS

For the next few centuries after the Chinese withdrawal at the end of the Tang dynasty, a number of mostly Turkic groups fought over the Tarim Basin and adjacent territories. Successive coalitions and empires lasted a few generations before being overrun by the next one or falling victim to internal warfare. In the 10th century, Muslim Karakhanids expanded from West Asia to displace predominantly Buddhist Uighur rulers around Kashgar and Khotan. Early in the 11th century, they split into eastern and western factions, divided by the Pamirs. Both sides were subdued by the Seljuks (mostly Muslim Turks) by the end of that century, but Seljuk rule was short-lived. By the end of the century, the Seljuks had split into several successor states. In the east they were overtaken by the Khitans (Buddhist nomads from the Far East speaking a Mongolian language), who had migrated to the west after they had themselves been driven out by the Manchurian Jurchens. Internal problems of the Khitans led to a revolt by the surviving Karakhanids, who had been ruling their old territory as vassals to the Seljuks and Khitans, but popular uprisings deposed them to preserve Khitan rule by 1212. (This time frame covers the early and most vigorous period of western European involvement in the Near East, outlined in ***GURPS Crusades.*** If participants in the first four Crusades make their way east, these are the conditions they'll find. ***GURPS Hot Spots: Constantinople*** is also relevant up through this point)

However, the salvation of the Khitans was about to be rendered moot. By 1218, the Mongols under Genghis Khan were on the move, and Central Asia was an early target. The region fell to them much as most of the rest of Asia did, but a number of long-time residents of the Tarim Basin came out of it reasonably well. Many Uighur rulers surrendered to the Mongols as quickly as possible and were allowed to remain as vassals and local administrators. A number of towns on the northern edge of the Tien Shan, such as Chash (modern Tashkent), grew during the years of peace and stability. (The historical and cultural coverage of ***GURPS Arabian Nights*** ends around this period.)

As the Mongol empire began to collapse into successor states in the late 13th century, much of the core Silk Road territories, from Bukhara to Dunhuang, became part of the Chagatai khanate, ruled by descendants of Genghis Khan. This country was short-lived. After about a century, the Chagatai territory split in two with the Pamirs as the dividing line, as the Karakhanids had done earlier. East of the Pamirs, Chagatai became Moghulistan, ruled by Mongol refugees fleeing the fall of the Yuan dynasty in China. At least initially, they followed their native religion and tolerated Christians and Buddhists. Despite the circumstances of its origin, Moghulistan generally maintained good relations with China and, as a neighbor, profited from trade through its territory. The land routes were no longer the preferred ones for long-range trade, but local trade was still quite lucrative. However, it suffered from constant internal strife and conflict with its other neighbors.

These internal problems made Moghulistan quite unstable. It subdivided into eastern and western regions, which in turn collapsed into self-ruling towns paying nominal allegiance to a khan or, by the early 17th century, a *khwaja*, a kind of Muslim religious leader. By this time, Buddhism and Christianity had become, if not entirely extinct, then at least very small minority religions in a largely Muslim Tarim Basin. By the end of the century, the khwajas were displaced by the Dzungar khanate, a nomadic Mongol confederation, who were in turn defeated during the return of the Chinese to Central Asia in the 1750s. The Chinese ruled the region lightly, though, retaining descendants of the old Chagatai rulers as vassals until the early 20th century.

KHANS AND EMIRS

Over time, there was a shift in the words Central Asian rulers used to describe themselves. Until after the collapse of the Mongol empire, most called themselves *khan* (the Mongol word), *khagan* (the Turkic equivalent), or some variant, meaning "king" or "chief." For example, the 13th-century Mongol rulers of Persia were called *ilkhans,* meaning provincial or subsidiary khans.

But the Mongol empire infused what had been a generic title with specific meaning, particularly in western areas. It came to imply descent from Genghis Khan. As new dynasties displaced Genghis' family, they required new titles. Being predominantly Muslim societies, they opted for the Arabic *emir,* which by this time had come to be associated with Islam. In this way, the khanate of Bukhara, established in the early 16th century, became the emirate of Bukhara in the late 18th century.

The western half of the Chagatai khanate saw the rise of an ethnically mixed Turkish and Mongol ruler, Timur the Lame. By 1370, Timur had consolidated his control of Transoxania and northern Persia, becoming acknowledged leader of that section of the Chagatai khanate, though the khans remained as figureheads. Timur went on to conquer all of Persia and sizable chunks of northern India and the Middle East. This was a golden age in particular for the city of Samarkand, which Timur largely rebuilt and decorated with most of its current architectural landmarks.

At its height at the dawn of the 15th century, the Timurid empire was the largest and most powerful of Muslim states, and Samarkand saw the flowering of a variety of intellectual traditions ranging from astronomy to book illumination to Persian *and* Turkish poetry. But, as with Genghis' empire centuries before, it could not survive the death of its founder. It was also the last of the great steppe empires built by Central Asian horsemen. After Timur died, the empire's provinces became essentially independent of one another and were slowly absorbed by resurgent Persians coming from the south and Turkish Uzbeks from the north. If travelers from the Western Europe of ***GURPS Hot Spots: Renaissance Florence*** journey east, they'll arrive to see the Persian and Uzbek expansion.

The most notable product of the Timurid successor kingdoms was the founder of another dynasty. In the early 16th century, the ruler of a minor territory in the Ferghana valley and descendant of Timur fought for years to conquer Transoxania, but to little avail. In the 1520s, he turned his attention to India and managed to defeat vastly larger armies than his own using cannon, at the time a novel weapon there. This ruler, Barbour, went on to found the Mogul dynasty which dominated northern India for centuries, but ironically the Moguls couldn't expand back into Central Asia. Instead, Transoxania saw the ebb and flow of Persian armies and Turkic, notably Uzbek and Khazak, tribes, into the 19th century.

THE MODERN AGE

As the 19th century dawned, the remainder of Central Asia not already controlled by China began to fall under the auspices of other empires. Britain and Russia maneuvered in the western portions of Central Asia in the "Great Game" (see also *Silk Road,* p. 45), slowly absorbing smaller emirates and kingdoms as their spheres of influence drew closer and closer. Not long after the last native rulers of the Tarim Basin fell under the distant authority of the Chinese, Transoxania became subject to the Russian empire, which slowly stretched its borders to the south. The emirate of Bukhara, encompassing Silk Road stops such as Samarkand and the Ferghana valley, was eventually conquered by the Russians in 1868, but it was governed by a Turkic emir until the Russian Revolution. And the southern approaches to Central Asia were increasingly encroached on by the British as they expanded their influence in India. Afghanistan remained as a buffer between the two empires, but the region was still of interest to everyone involved.

A great deal of what people in the West know about this region comes first and foremost from the second half of the 19th century. This period was in essence the final flowering of Europe's Age of Exploration, with geographers finally penetrating the interiors of both Asia and Africa. And while some of those explorers were in it for the sake of knowledge alone, the devices of empire and commerce were never far behind. Although Africa saw a general European land grab (mostly the English competing with the French, but with the Germans, Belgians, and others picking up what they could), exploration in Central Asia was closely linked to Britain's defense of its Indian possessions and Russia looking to avoid British hegemony in southern Asia.

This included both a sort of opening of Tibet (which, like the opening of Japan, was largely at the barrel of a gun) and explorations in and around the Tarim Basin, a region called at the time "Chinese Turkestan." Russian and British agents gathered geographic information, both out of intellectual curiosity and for political and military reasons. Sir Marc Aurel Stein, the most notable early explorer of the Tarim Basin, undertook three important expeditions there between 1900 and 1916, returning with countless cases of artifacts and inspiring a generation of treasure hunters.

Soon thereafter, Central Asia was wracked by a series of upheavals. By 1918, Russian Central Asia (as ever, the Pamirs were the border between the Chinese east and everybody else's west) was a chaotic mess as the Russian Revolution raged. Bolsheviks based in Tashkent, White Russians based in the Ferghana valley, and scattered Mensheviks fought one another with lance-armed cavalry, machine guns, and armored trains. Anglo-Indian forces probed the region, trying to intervene against the Bolsheviks with mixed success. Local warlords and Cossacks claiming independence were involved on various sides as they pursued their own ends. The region also held thousands of German and Austrian POWs, shipped to what had been thought to be a safe location far from WWI's eastern front. Some of them eventually joined the Bolsheviks to fight the British.

Secret Geographers

Given the hostility of many Central Asians to Russia and Britain, whom they reasonably saw as dangerous invaders, the Western powers had to gather information in secret. Since there were no maps available, this included even the most basic geographical information: where major cities were, the distances between points, significant land routes, and so on. The Western powers enlisted local or near-local assistance and trained them in covert surveying techniques. For example, white British agents couldn't enter Tibet, but Indians could visit if they could plausible claim to be Buddhists on pilgrimages. Traveling in disguise, these spies employed techniques such as using Buddhist "rosary" beads to keep track of the number of paces traveled along a road and monitoring the temperature at which water boiled to measure altitude.

Great Gamers

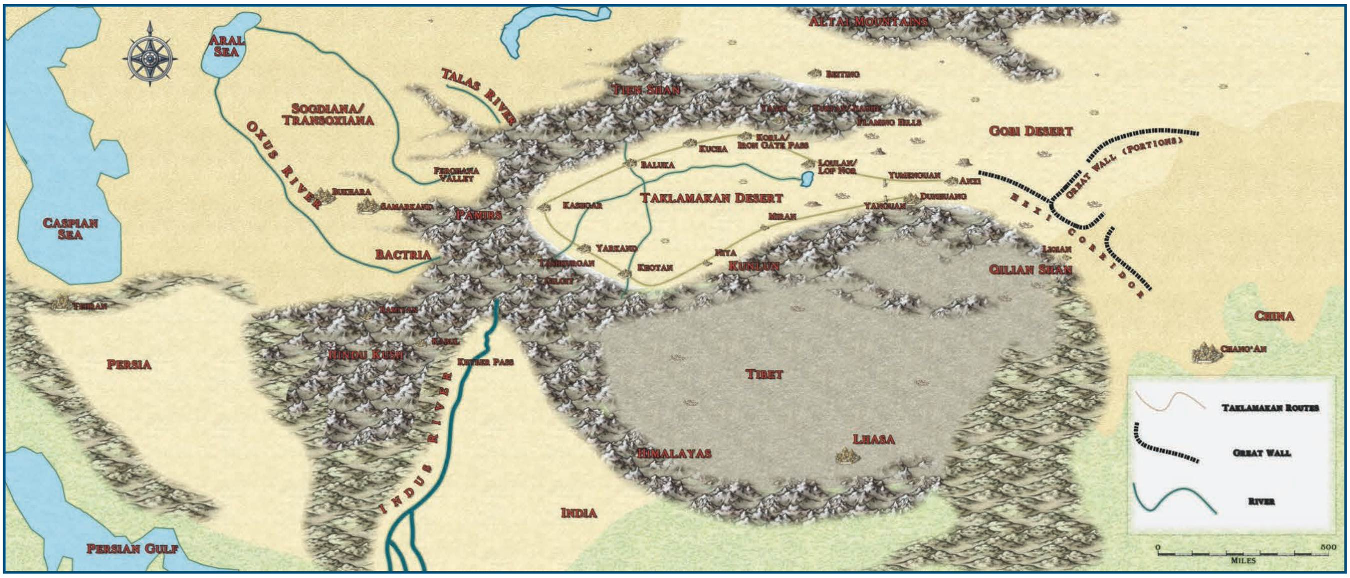
Central Asia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries provides nearly as much scope for adventure as the golden years of the Silk Road. Between two large multi-sided civil wars, recurring ethnic unrest, and both political and historical interest from external powers, there's plenty of pulp-era adventure for bandits, gun runners, spies, revolutionaries, regular soldiers, mercenaries, treasure hunters, and even legitimate scholars. This is another time when pretty much anybody in the world could show up. A barnstorming American heiress and her two-fisted Brazilian paleontologist sidekick could join forces with Uzbek Bakuninites to prevent a Sorbonne-educated Han warlord and his Kuomintang-funded Uighur cavalry from wiping out a hidden Buddhist monastery while outmaneuvering the machinations of an Anglo-Indian master spy disguised as a Muslim holy man, and it would actually be kind of plausible. ***GURPS High-Tech: Adventure Guns*** (being an out of the way location, it'd be unsurprising to find 19th-century firearms still in use here and there in 1920s Central Asia) and both volumes of ***GURPS High-Tech: Pulp Guns*** are invaluable for this era, and ***GURPS Cliffhangers*** certainly couldn't hurt.

The Bolsheviks eventually gained the upper hand and suppressed opposition to the Soviet government in the 1920s, but similar upheavals were going on in Chinese territory. A series of revolts and disturbances starting in 1911, leading to the overthrow of the ancient imperial system and the establishment of a short-lived republic, left the Tarim Basin governed by local warlords. The Xinjiang warlords shifted alliances between various factions in both China and neighboring Russia, sometimes allying with White Russians or Soviets as circumstances dictated. Far from the centers of power, they essentially established their own foreign policies. Several died at the hands of insurgents or untrustworthy underlings, but at least one managed to make it out to a comfortable retirement in Taiwan.

In the 1930s and 1940s, there were even recurring attempts by at least parts of the province to declare independence from China, usually with Soviet support, and acting at odds with both the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party. However, the region was finally pacified after the establishment of the People's Republic of China and of the Communist government's authority over the whole country. The old Silk Road territories became a firm border between two rival nations, with the PRC and the USSR keeping a wary eye on each other. Xinjiang was, for a long time, a half-forgotten desert, then a frontier for mineral exploration and weapon tests far away from prying eyes.

But with the collapse of the Soviet Union into a collection of "-stans" and China's gradual reopening to the outside world, the old silk routes are, in a way, being revived. In 2013, China proposed a series of initiatives to increase trade and improve relations with a number of Central Asian nations. This plan includes new train lines connecting Xi'an, the original imperial capital, to India, Istanbul, and Eastern Europe through Xinjiang province and the small nations of Central Asia. The plan, which explicitly hearkens back to the trade routes of antiquity, is intended to revive those ancient connections between East and West. As of August 2016, it's become possible to send cargo by rail from China to Afghanistan over routes once traveled by lonely merchants, monks, and camels. The original Silk Road, at last, is open once more.

> *[The Silk Road's] historical importance goes far beyond the tonnage or monetary value of items exchanged.*
>
> – ***GURPS Hot Spots: The Silk Road***


Aral Sea
Caspian Sea
Sogdiana/ Transoxiana
Oxus River
Talas River
Tien Shan
Altai Mountains
Beiting
Yanqi
Turfan/Jiaohe
Flaming Hills
Gobi Desert
Kucha
Korla/ Iron Gate Pass
Baluka
Loulan/ Lop Nor
Yumenguan
Anxi
Ferghana Valley
Bukhara
Samarkand
Pamirs
Kashgar
Taklamakan Desert
Dunhuang
Yangguan
Miran
Great Wall (portions)
Hexi Corridor
Bactria
Yarkand
Tashkurgan
Khotan
Niya
Kunlun
Gilgit
Liqian
Qilian Shan
Tehran
Bamiyan
Kabul
Hindu Kush
Khyber Pass
Persia
China
Chang'an
Tibet
Indus River
Himalayas
Lhasa
India
Persian Gulf
Taklamakan Routes
Great Wall
River
0
500
Miles

MAP OF CENTRAL ASIA, OVERVIEW

See ***GURPS Hot Spots: Silk Roads*** for descriptions of locations.

BESTIARY

The Silk Road tries to address real history, gesturing vaguely in the direction of supernatural belief mostly as a social phenomenon. When it comes to actual games, though, many GMs want something with a little more magic. For those purposes, here are a few magical creatures one might have encountered on the Silk Road, as imagined by those who actually traveled it, as well as one possibly real beast.

HEAVENLY HORSES

The famous "heavenly horses" which led China to open the Silk Road in the first place aren't a particular breed, of course. They're a general description of the kinds of horses available to the Chinese through Central Asian horse breeders. The cavalry horse (p. B459) and the heavy warhorse (p. B460) are both plausibly within the range of what could be sold as heavenly horses, but the "real" version of a heavenly horse below provides another reasonable example. However, the traits attributed to them by awestruck poets and generals suggest *truly* heavenly horses, semi-magical creatures with miraculous origins.

Heavenly Horse (Real)

Heavenly horses are a bit over average height for a horse, about 16 hands, but not huge like a draft horse. Ideally, in addition to "sweating blood" (possibly a symptom of skin parasites), they have a relatively small head, long neck, short legs, and a thickly muscled body.

ST: 23 **HP:** 23 **Speed:** 5.25
DX: 9 **Will:** 10 **Move:** 8
IQ: 3 **Per:** 10 **Weight:** 1,600 lbs.
HT: 12 **FP:** 12 **SM:** +1 (3 hexes)

Dodge: 9 **Parry:** N/A **DR:** 0

Bite (12): 2d-2 crushing. Reach C.
Kick (10): 2d+1 crushing. Reach C, 1.

Traits: Combat Reflexes; Domestic Animal; Enhanced Move 1 (Ground Speed 16); Hooves; Peripheral Vision; Quadruped; Weak Bite.
Skills: Brawling-12; Mount-13.
Cost: $5,000.
Notes: If sweating blood is in fact a consequence of a skin infestation, HT may be 11 (reducing Speed to 5.00 but not changing Move).

Heavenly Horse (Mythic)

The heavenly horses of legend are the offspring of dragons. They are tireless, and they seem to fly. Such animals are priceless.

ST: 23 **HP:** 23 **Speed:** 5.25
DX: 9 **Will:** 10 **Move:** 9
IQ: 3 **Per:** 10 **Weight:** 1,600 lbs.
HT: 12 **FP:** N/A **SM:** +1 (3 hexes)

Dodge: 9 **Parry:** N/A **DR:** 0

Bite (12): 2d-2 crushing. Reach C.
Kick (10): 2d+1 crushing. Reach C, 1.

Traits: Combat Reflexes; Domestic Animal; Enhanced Move 1 (Ground Speed 18); Hooves; Peripheral Vision; Quadruped; Walk on Air; Weak Bite.
Skills: Brawling-12; Mount-14; Running-12.
Notes: Mythic heavenly horses may sweat blood as they exert themselves, but they never tire. They neither have nor spend Fatigue.

Hundred-Foot Python

Journey to the West contains any number of gods, demons, ghosts, and monsters ranging from the conventional to the downright baroque, made all the more complicated by the fact that nearly everyone in the book is a shapeshifter. One of the less difficult-to-understand monsters mentioned in passing is the hundred-foot python, some of which infested the forbidding landscape of the Western Regions.

ST: 135
DX: 12
IQ: 2
HT: 11

HP: 135
Will: 10
Per: 10
FP: 11

Speed: 5.75
Move: 5
Weight: 1.8 tons
SM: +8

Dodge: 8 **Parry:** N/A **DR:** 2

Bite (12): 14d+1 crushing. Reach C.
Tail Strike (12): 14d+16 crushing (rear only). Reach C-15.

Traits: Cold-Blooded (50°); Constriction Attack; Obscure 5 (Vision); Vermiform; Wild Animal.
Skills: Brawling-12; Stealth-12; Wrestling-13.
Notes: While mostly just very, very large snakes, hundred-foot pythons exhale clouds of vapor from their nostrils. Sadly, while these clouds may hide the python's head, most of its body is well out of the area of effect.

Ro-Langs

Many of the monsters of Asia qualify more or less as undead. Tibet, for example, has the *ro-langs* (the word is both singular and plural), a broad category of humans who have returned from the dead. These may be either spontaneously created if an evil spirit possesses a dead body or deliberately produced by a magician. While the latter is a particular risk to the magician, who may do so for a variety of mystical purposes, the former is a threat to everyone. A spontaneous ro-langs operates much like an infectious zombie, turning anyone it touches on the top of the head into another ro-langs like itself.

While ro-langs are usually malevolent, they can be focused on a particular target. The creature cannot speak, but it will signal witnesses to remain silent with gestures of its stiff arms or by wiggling its tongue.

Stiffness is a general characteristic of the ro-langs. Like most undead from neighboring China, a ro-langs does not move well. It walks with a stiff, jerking gait and cannot bend over. Some Tibetan houses have low doorways as a defense; a ro-langs can't bend down to enter.

ST: 15
DX: 11
IQ: 10
HT: 11

HP: 15
Will: 10
Per: 10
FP: 11

Speed: 5.50
Move: 5
Weight: 150 lbs.
SM: +0

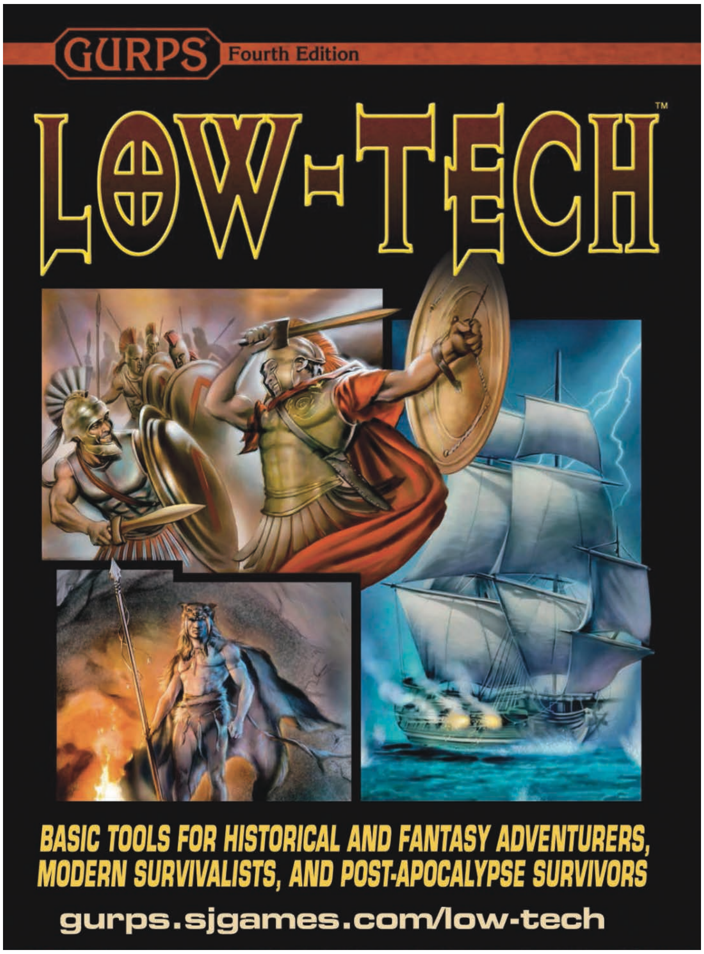
Dodge: 8 **Parry:** 10 **DR:** 0

Punch (15): 1d crushing + follow-up death touch (see Notes). Range C, 1.

Traits: Cannot Kick; Ham-Fisted; Mute. A spontaneous ro-langs has Bad Temper, Bestial, and Bloodlust.
Skills: Brawling-15.
Notes: The "death touch" ability potentially turns a victim into a ro-langs. If the ro-langs successfully attacks the skull and *any* damage penetrates DR, the target must roll against HT at a penalty equal to the penetrating damage or become a ro-langs immediately. This is somewhere between Dominance (p. B50) and Infectious Attack (p. B140); the new ro-langs essentially loses all personality and won't seek revenge on its maker, but the ro-langs responsible doesn't gain the new one as an Ally either. The durability of ro-langs varies considerably. There are five classes of ro-langs. The first three can be dispatched with a mere glancing blow, doing damage from breaking the skin to cutting into the flesh (all count as a single point of damage). The last two, though, require breaking bone (must take crippling damage to a limb) or hitting a specific vulnerable spot (attackers must figure out where that spot is, which will be at least -8 to hit, but only a single point of damage is necessary to kill the ro-langs).

About the Author

Matt Riggsby received degrees in anthropology and archaeology before becoming a computer programmer. He currently works for an international healthcare corporation and has been known to return from the East bearing a cargo of silk and spices. He lives with his wife who is a goddess of mercy, a son who is full of filial piety, and several dogs who get lost easily.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RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

COMPLICATIONS IN A CERTAIN WORLD

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

Our household plays a lot of cooperative games. In part we developed this because our son when he was younger didn't handle losing games well (he still doesn't) but mostly because we don't have a huge competitive streak in us. We view games as being an entertainment option we'd otherwise fill with movies, jigsaw puzzles, or other group activities – including roleplaying games (which, in my circles, *aren't* adversarial).

Unfortunately, it's often a challenge finding a game that provides the right level of . . . well, *challenge.* Gaming companies are good about adjusting difficulty in most games, but they usually range from "average" to "super-difficult." We remember checking out one promising-looking game at Gen Con last year and talking with the designer, who said the base difficulty was about a 50% success rate, with the option to go up from there. After I asked, "Can you tweak it to make it *easier?*" the creator looked at me like I asked if it could be shredded and brewed into a tea.

The trouble for us is that it's actually fairly tricky to make a game easier while still maintaining *some* challenge. I mean, it's simple to set up a game, loudly shout "We won!" . . . and then put it all away.

So, how to bridge this gap? Well, the answer ties into the idea of setbacks with roleplaying games.

HALF THE FUN

Envision three groups of RPG heroes arriving at their destination.

- The first looks the same as when they departed, appearing no worse for the wear.
- The second looks mostly like when they departed, but they are mildly bruised and bleeding.
- In the third group, you see that one is using his normal chosen weapon in his off-hand because his primary arm is in a sling. Another – who normally wears glasses – is squinting and muttering about needing to see an optometrist. The final member of the party is covered with scratches and beak-marks and is holding what she claims is a trained attack rooster – "But don't worry; I turned him to our side . . . I think."

Which of those groups are you most anxious to hear their story?

If you start with the baseline assumption that the heroes are likely to complete the adventure that's before them, then the interesting question becomes: How do the heroes win . . . and what interesting things happen along the way? Setbacks are the perfect way to encapsulate and accentuate that.

With our co-op board gaming, the challenge has been to tone down the difficulty while keeping the games entertaining. Thus we're generally fine with *more* stuff happening (because that's exciting!), and we really like getting to do more things (since you don't need to worry about having done the *best* thing in any situation if you get to do two *good* things). So, for us, "setbacks" in our board gaming just result in more fun situations we get to talk about afterwards.

I realize the same has applied to my tabletop gaming. If the GM and players both know that the heroes are almost certainly going to save the kingdom from the Flesheater Plague, then a lot of the interest can come from those moments that *aren't* as certain: the unexpected fire in a beloved tavern, or the lost child who accompanies the heroes for a time while hoping to be reunited with parents. When the outcome isn't in much doubt, getting there is often more than half the fun – because *that's* where the uncertainty lies.

So the purpose of setbacks isn't to ensure that heroes don't arrive at their destination totally intact (our first hypothetical example). Nor are they just a way to whittle down the party's hit points and resources (the second example).

> *Setbacks are just learning experiences.*
>
> *– Beth Brooke*

Rather, complications serve to bolster foregone conclusions by amplifying the parts that *aren't* known.

WAIT; I HAVE FOUR POINTS IN *WHAT*?!

One of the advantages of setbacks for the heroes and GM is that it gives an opportunity for heroes to shine in unusual situations. In campaigns that revolve around combat, most heroes tend to have one or two go-to maneuvers they default to ("whack 'em with a sword" or "dodge and shoot"). But if the situation is a runaway mule cart or an ally succumbing to madness, the go-to solutions won't usually work in those instances. (Although if anyone has played a hero whose default action in most situations is "I supply psychological analysis," *I really,* ***really*** *want to hear about it.*)

In fact, it's often possible to create interesting encounters or setback situations for the heroes by looking through their character sheets and picking out skills or advantages that haven't been used in a while (that are at a fairly competent level), and building an encounter that could be overcome with that ability. Thus if a hero has Meteorology, the party might be placed in an outdoor situation where there's incentive to advance to meet an aggressive timetable, but the weather might be taking a turn for the worse soon; do they press on, or take shelter? Meteorology to the rescue!

Of course, if you take this tack, don't force-feed your proposed solution to the players ("Hey, Sara, you *do* have Meteorology hint hint . . .") – but also don't be surprised if the heroes do something completely unexpected. ("I use my flight to soar above the clouds and try to see where the storm is coming from.")

Similarly, setbacks can be designed around disadvantages or quirks that haven't gotten any screen time recently. For a lighthearted moment, maybe a chimpanzee takes an intense interest in a nearsighted hero's spectacles; does it dare steal them at an inopportune moment, or does the human just need to endure the ape's affections? Or, for a more serious complication, maybe a former hard-drinking hero's Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor is on the verge of falling off the wagon and desperately calls the PC for help; does the hero endanger the current mission by aiding his friend?

IN ELVISH, "CRISIS" IS COMPOSED OF THE WORDS "OPPORTUNITY" AND "LOOT"

Another tack to take with complications in RPGs is to use them to further the plot or game in some fashion, with either scraps of information or loot that may be useful (or at least interesting). For example, in *The Empire Strikes Back,* Luke's encounter with the yeti-like wampa creature on the ice planet is certainly a setback, but the GM uses that opportunity to feed Luke's player information from ghost Obi-Wan that Luke should go to Dagobah and seek Yoda. Similarly, in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens,* a cantina brawl results in the heroes ending up with Luke Skywalker's old lightsaber.

In my experience, players tend to be fairly forgiving of – even happy with – setbacks if they feel like their actions got them a piece of intel they didn't have before, or if the episode resulted in some new item or ability.

In fact, it can be handy to have a list the GM pulls from for exactly this situation. For example, maybe the heroes are attempting to reconstruct what happened to them during a week that none of them remember. In the middle of a firefight, the GM decides that the stress of the situation triggers a memory for one of the heroes; he goes down the list and finds one that pertains to loud noises. ("You remember the screeching of birds, but it wasn't unpleasant; maybe it was an aviary?"). Now the heroes have a new lead they might be able to explore in the future . . . *if* they survive their current situation.

RECOMMENDED VIEWING

I was heavily inspired for this column by the *Extra Credits* episode "Strategic Uncertainty: Keeping Strategy Games Fresh" – **youtube.com/watch?v=PJKTDz1zYzs.** Although this YouTube show is discussing computer strategy games, I found a lot of wisdom that could be stolen outright for tabletop games . . . including insight into the psychology of why doing certain things to players feels more-or-less cheap. And – at 8.5 minutes – it's a quick view.

EASIER DOES IT!

It's tangential to the idea of this column, but here are some of the house rules we've come up with for our favorite co-op games to take the edge off the difficulty but still retain the core game play element that we enjoy.

- ***Forbidden Island:*** This is a rare game where the "beginner" level in the rules is actually easy enough for us.
- ***Forbidden Desert:*** The only tweak we needed to make this less stressful is to say that – when a watering hole is revealed – it's available to drink from once for each player (they don't need to be present when it's revealed).
- ***Castle Panic*** *(and others in the series):* Each player has a hand size of one more card than the rules say (so five cards for a three-player game).
- ***Sentinels of the Multiverse:*** Each turn, players may either play two cards or use two powers.
- ***Pathfinder Adventure Card Game:*** For all rolls, players get a bonus equal to the number of open locations, minus 1; "temporarily closed" equals "closed" for this rule, so the final encounter with the villain will always be without a bonus from this rule. (This is the house rule we're probably least thrilled by, but it seems to work okay for us.)

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for over 10 years; during that time, he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son.

ABOUT *GURPS*

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of ***GURPS*** players. We can be reached by email: **info@sjgames.com**. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Resources include:

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Map of Central Asia and Silk Road Locations, ***Pyramid #3/103: Setbacks***

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